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BOB DEAN;

OR,

"OUR OTHER BOARDER."

BY

MRS. EMMA NELSON HOOD,
OF AUSTIN, TEXAS.

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EMMA NELSON HOOD.
1881.

J. FAGAN & SON,
STEREOTYPERS, PHILAD'A.

TO

DR. O. C. POPE,

OF HOUSTON, TEXAS,

THIS BOOK

Is Respectfully Dedicated

BY

THE AUTHOR.

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BOB DEAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE DAYS OF THE REPUBLIC.

TEXAS has been neglected by romancers. The geese, whose cackling saved the Roman city, became illustrious; while the pigs, whose martyr death is said to have been the salvation of the young "Republic," are unknown beyond her domain, and forgotten within its limit.

Have you ever heard the story? No? Then I will tell it you in the language of one of her own early historians.

"The independence of Texas had been acknowledged by the United States, England, and France, and M. de Saligny, the French Minister, was residing at Austin, and had erected near the city one of the finest residences then in Texas . . . and perhaps he might have remained but for an unfortunate difficulty between himself and Mr. Bullock, the principal hotel-keeper in the city. It appears that Mr. Bullock's pigs were in the habit of running around M. de Saligny's stable, and some of them were killed by one of the servants of the French Minister, whereupon Mr. Bullock whipped the servant. The Minister got mad and called upon Mr. Bullock about the matter, who, not being entirely in a good humor, ordered him off the premises in language perhaps not the

most polite. The Minister, feeling that France was insulted, called upon the President (Lamar), and demanded the immediate punishment of Mr. Bullock, which he declined to accede to, but turned him over to the civil authorities. This did not appease the anger of the Minister by any manner of means, and he conducted himself in such a manner as to induce the President to ask that he be recalled, which was done. This, apparently, was a small matter, but it produced great results. It prevented the Republic from obtaining what is commonly known as the French Loan, for which negotiations were then pending, and had she been successful, would have been the ruin of the Young Republic."

In the year 1839, the little village of Waterloo, whose population was represented by three families, was selected by the commissioners appointed for the purpose as the future capital of Texas.

Situate on the bluff overlooking the blue, winding Colorado, whose limpid waters laugh in the glowing sunlight, the new city, Austin, sprang up apace. The census of January, 1840, gave the population at eight hundred.

Among the immigrants into this new world came Judge Robert Osgood Dean, from Philadelphia, a man of capital and of culture. He left his elegant home and circle of refined friends to seek health from the free zephyrs that fan the broad prairies of the West. But a brief enjoyment of the voluptuous climate will imbue with enthusiasm the man who visits the prairies in the hilarious springtime of the South. The rollicking wind, with its savor from the salt sea; the broad acres of virgin sod, whose grassy billows are studded with the nodding "blue bonnets" of Buffalo clover (Trifolium Reflexum), where the pink and gold primroses vie with brilliant patches of "Spanish blanket" and wild verbenas;

the "cattle upon a thousand hills," whose fat flanks attest the richness of their diet of mesquite; the herds of mustangs, not less free than the white clouds scudding overhead; all these fill the heart of the traveller with an ecstatic wonder, and he resolves to make his home here while life lasts, and, fate willing, to decree his mortality be added to the generous soil, which gives him so rich a welcome. He writes home to his friends and *tries* to tell them what it is that intoxicates his senses, and he urges them, too, to come.

And if, when a "hard" winter ensues, and leaden sky is dripping and prairie is brown and sodden; when the live cattle and horses have sought the covert of the "bottom" thickets, and the numerous dead diversify the plains with their hideous carcasses; when the grass is sere and the flowers forgotten—then if he grows disgusted and returns home declaring that "Texas is overrated," it will be only to return in the spring, finding it impossible to resist the impulse that draws him.

Judge Dean, though past his youth, threw himself zealously into the spirit of the day. He unreservedly espoused the interests of his adopted government, participated in the inaugural ceremonies of President Houston on his election, took a personal part in the notorious Archive War, and assisted his fellow-citizens in repelling the frequent incursions of the Comanches, whose homes were in the cliffs and fastnesses of the Lampasas mountains, skirting the town on the north and east.

A part of his large capital Judge Dean expended in purchasing the rich lands to be bought then for a mere song. Some of the most valuable business lots in the new city came into his possession; but a goodly portion of his money he left invested securely in Philadelphia. While a successful man in his legal profession, he had always felt an antipathy

to actual trade, and had for years contented himself with putting his money to work for him, instead of working with it. His life had not been a happy one. Married early to a beautiful woman, younger than himself in years, but older in worldly wisdom, his twenty months of connubial life had been potent to show him that man is born unto trouble. Then he buried his wife and shut his heart to womankind in maturity. But there was a wee piece of womanhood, his baby daughter, Annetta, who was very dear to him, and he intended to rear her to be noble and true. When a little girl she was weird and wise, and he laughed at her shrewdness, and was proud of her beauty. But when she grew up her wisdom was only cunning, her shrewdness duplicity, and in view of this her father deplored the fatal beauty that gave her power.

Two years ago he had given her to one he named "good," and when Robert Dean said that of a man it embodied most of the noble qualities of manhood. Col. Chapin, his daughter's husband, had his full confidence and friendship. He hoped Annetta would be dutiful and make him happy, and he sighed to think how perilous a thing it is for a good man to give his life's happiness into the keeping of a woman.

About this time his health, never robust, began to yield under the strain of business and worry, and his physician advised a change for him. So he made ready to go to Texas, then the traveller's novelty, but before he could get off he was stricken down with nervous prostration, and for months he was a weary, fretful prisoner in his sick chamber. One day, when he was utterly despondent, the good doctor brought to see him his young daughter. "To cheer you, you know, sir. You are blue. Esther is used to sick people, and she will brighten you up."

He could never remember how it was, but if a veritable angel from heaven had winged her way into his dreary room, the effect could not have been enhanced. She did cheer him. Cheered him until he was well again, and then he could not do without the sunshine of her presence. He knew she, too, was good, and he loved her and told his love. She confessed that he had her heart in return, but she would not then give her hand with it. He must go away a year, and see if he did change his mind. So he came to Texas.

CHAPTER II.

A POINT CARRIED.

JUDGE DEAN did not change his mind. Ere the "Lone Star" had added her rays to Uncle Sam's galaxy, he had gone home for his bride and returned to Austin. Col. and Mrs. Chapin, and several other friends came with them, enticed by the stories of wealth, health, and happiness to be attained here.

On the north-west corner of Pecan and Lavacca there stands an old two-story house, built of brick and painted red. Without the appurtenances of modern architecture, it now looks so uninteresting it would hardly occur to you that within its bleak walls young love dreams had been cherished, or a hero of romance born. But at this time it was one of the "palatial residences" which the "Austin City Gazette" and "Sentinel" boasted were "being erected in our rising city of the West." And here Judge Dean prepared for his bride a home of ease and as much elegance as the limited facilities

of the day permitted, when freights were hauled overland in ox-wagons from Houston, Matagorda, or from Mexico, incurring the risks of weather and Indian depredations.

Col. Chapin had a home for his family not far from his father-in-law, and on East Pecan Street was the flourishing banking house of "Chapin & Co.," the Co. representing Judge Dean and his Philadelphia capital, withdrawn and invested here, where his son-in-law was sure it would realize "millions." With his usual antipathy to trade, he took little active interest in the business, but in a great measure gave himself up to the enjoyment of his home, a pleasure unknown in the past, but now fully realized in the devotion of his young wife.

After fifteen years we look again into their lives, years eventful to the young State, but placid to our friend. Chapin & Co., bankers and brokers, have realized, if not millions, a princely fortune. The population of Austin has increased to about eight thousand, the State is free from debt, handsome public buildings erected, and trade brisk. But in the near future is gathering a cloud. In 1860 the country begins to feel the throes of the gigantic struggle approaching so near. The financial strength of trade is thrilled to its centre, and some imprudent and weak houses have already gone to pieces. Chapin & Co. have traded largely of late, and it is unreasonable that the public should think they can afford to steadily pay out gold to be hoarded up, buried perhaps, until times are quieter.

Col. Chapin says so, as he stands in his office this January day.

It is past four o'clock, and business is closed when the partners hold their council. Col. Chapin is a fleshy man, well past forty, said by his friends to be a fine-looking gentle-

man. He has not any top hair to speak of, but his very black beard is full and lengthy; soft, sallow skin, and black eyes, sharp but bilious. His dress is rich, and a big brilliant flashes on the least finger of the fat, yellow hand, which habitually toys with the fox-head charm pending from his massive watch-chain.

Judge Dean contrasts him in a marked degree. Seated in his office chair, contemplating the wood fire which burns in the open fire-place, he is a benevolent-looking elderly gentleman. With clean, snow-white hair, brushed straight back from a broad, kindly brow, face pale, but not wrinkled or careworn, we would say that the fifteen years of domestic bliss had robbed Time of his spoils.

But this afternoon he is annoyed, and there is an unwonted petulance in the tone that replies to a remark just made by his partner.

"But, Chapin, I don't see how in justice we can do anything else. We have taken their money, and our paper is out. If they bring it back, demanding their gold, they must have it!"

"But they can't get it, I tell you, Judge. On day after to-morrow our note for that cotton purchase over at Bastrop falls due — thirty-five hundred dollars it is. If the shipment reached New Orleans when it ought to have done so it brought a good price, and we will get the money back with a nice margin next week; but if this pressure keeps up we will go under before it gets here."

He paused to munch his beard which he put between his teeth, always with the jewelled hand.

"Cordina & DeLeon," he continued, "want to get seventeen thousand dollars in the morning, and they offer fourteen per cent. for it and good security — a mortgage on the Van

Dusen ranche lying a few miles this side of San Antonio. I know the property and know their papers. They have a good and sufficient lien on the entire ranche, stock and interest. 'T will be a first-rate investment for us, because they would rather turn over the property to us and keep the money, which Cordina wants to invest. Beef will command a good price this year, and the drive will cover the note, without touching the stock cattle or ranche."

He chews his black beard and tightens his lips into a grin, a peculiar habit of his when preoccupied. Judge Dean answers:

"But we cannot spare the seventeen thousand; it will be as much as we can do to weather the storm as it is, unless I sacrifice my real estate," and, rising, he mended the fire with the tongs, and, turning his back to it, looked with kind eyes at the Colonel, who grinned again before answering, with some hesitation.

"We can't, if we keep on paying out at the rate we've been doing to-day. But—" he paused to chew and grin, "but we might let Cordina have the money to-morrow, and then stop payment a few days until we could get on our legs again. 'T would perhaps do no one any real harm. These fools are only crazy about their gold—they will all be bringing it back in a month."

"Not to us, if we were to follow your policy. It is theirs, Chapin, and they have a right to it when they call for it. It would be dishonorable in us to divert the capital of the house to other channels, instead of paying our just debts."

Judge Dean has lost his patience, and puts on his overcoat with unseemly haste. The sleeve is not well managed, and proves refractory. Colonel Chapin comes courteously to his assistance, and draws the garment snugly into place, while he answers,—

"Dishonorable is a hard word, Judge. It is no more than all business houses do under pressure. Our creditors ought to have some consideration about them. Come, you think it over to-night at home, Judge, and come down early in the morning, so we can have another talk before business hours."

He handed the Senior his soft black hat and his cane, and let him out at the door, laying his hand soothingly on his shoulder as they parted.

Judge Dean walked slowly homeward, stopped frequently on his way by the greeting of friends, for all loved and honored the upright citizen. At his own gate he was accosted in childish tones with —

"Oh, father! father! just see! I've been waiting to show you what I've got. It is one of old Speck's chickens! When Aunt Sukie went to shut 'em up in the coop the door fell and hurt this little fellow. See! he can't stand up!"

The Judge stooped down to kiss his boy, a bright, manly lad of nine years, his pride, and only offspring of his last marriage.

"Put him down, Bob, and let's see. No, he will never walk again; but don't hurt him, son."

"Oh, no! I wouldn't hurt him for anything. And he was such a *smart* chicken. I was noticing yesterday that he was the first always to get what the old hen found for them. I picked him out for my favorite and named him Pluck."

"He doesn't look plucky now. Come, let us go in and find mother."

"Yes, dinner is waiting, and she has only just left the door. She has been looking for you."

An hour afterwards the lamps are lighted in the family room, and father and mother are having a cosy talk by the

fire while the boy is doing something with his wounded chicken on the floor near the table, and meanwhile giving half heed to the conversation.

"Their talk can't be very nice," he is thinking, "for father stands up with his back to the fire instead of resting in the easy-chair I bought for him Christmas with my own money; and mother has laid down her crochet work, and looks at him, and talks a good deal. It is about the business and brother Irwin they are talking—but I wish I had a knife that would *cut;* this one won't. My matches break before I can split them. I wish I had some nice splints like Dr. Martin had, but I guess I can make these do." Aloud now—

"Please, father, will you lend me your knife a *little* while?"

"What are you doing, Bob?"

"Oh, I'm going to mend my chicken's leg."

"*Mend* it! how, my son?"

"Why, I'll just cut these matches right thin, and hold the leg straight, and with a little strip of this linen cloth bind them tight around it—don't you see?" and he leaped to his feet and ran eagerly to show his plan, which he demonstrated on the forefinger of his left hand.

Judge Dean and his wife exchanged smiles as the boy returned to his work, having obtained the knife he coveted.

"Did he ever see anything of the kind done, mother?"

The boy spoke quickly—"Oh, yes, father—excuse me for answering, mother—but last week when Charley Froude fell from the acting pole at Mr. Smith's school and broke his arm, they took him home, and he wanted me to go with him to carry his books and marbles; and Dr. Martin took some thin pieces of wood and fixed his arm up like I tell you. Oh, mother! when I get to be a man, I mean to be a surgeon—that is what they call a doctor who mends bones,"—and the

little fellow drew a deep breath of satisfaction at the thought.

The parents smiled again and went on with their talk, little dreaming he had indeed marked out his future.

A tap at the door, announcing callers; but it is only Colonel and Mrs. Chapin, who enter as privileged characters.

I have said that Mrs. Chapin was a beautiful woman, and when the adjective has been extended to its most superlative degree, it has not been made too strong to express her charms, chiefest among which is her voice. Language can hardly convey the smooth, thrilling cadences, as her words flow with the intonation of silver bells. Every word that falls from her scarlet lips is as pure and clear cut as a dew-drop in the morning sunlight.

"Good-evening, papa! how do you feel now? Colonel tells me you complained to-day of not enjoying your wonted health. Better? I am rejoiced to hear it, and to believe that your indisposition was only temporary, perhaps induced by your intense solicitude to do your duty to that Juggernaut business. 'T is a pity that one with your literary taste and æsthetic culture, fitted to grace society in its highest niche, should ever need to soil his hands with the dealings of ordinary mortals. Nay, you need not disclaim; you know it is but true, Esther; you need not to assure me *you* are well, for naught but perfect health could keep you so fresh—so sweet."

All this said standing, with a hand of each held in her own soft, white ones—so soft and white, one is irresistibly reminded of the paws of a pussy cat. But now she turns to little Bob, who stands impatiently waiting, too well trained to interrupt.

"And dear little brother, how are you? You have not been to see my Paul since so long a time. You ought to come

oftener, for he is never so good as when he has been with you, you perfect little paragon!" and she pats his chubby cheek with her—I had like to have said—paw; but she did not see that he wanted to kiss her, for he was fond of his beautiful lady sister; but Mrs. Chapin rarely kissed any one: those perfect lips she kept sacred; 't was only her paws she used on other people. Perhaps the weird faith of the Hindoo fire-worshipper, that the soul of man is in his breath, had unconsciously possessed her, and she feared its true nature, like alcohol, could be detected by inhalation.

She now seats herself in the luxurious chair which Bob had wheeled in from the parlor for her, and she might be a queen enthroned, for looks.

"Why didn't you bring the children, Annetta?" asked her father.

"Oh! my little ones were all naughty this afternoon—all but baby Maude, who would, doubtless, also have come under condemnation, had she been strong enough to leave her cradle to tread on forbidden ground. Do you know, papa, I am becoming a firm believer in your doctrine of total depravity," and she folded her hands over her lace-covered breast with the air of a martyr.

"Pray, what did the little ones do to bring down on their heads such condemnation?"

"I will tell you. I had only just finished having them arrayed in their nicest clothes, for I was going to drive to the cemetery with them, and intended to call at the mansion on my return—you know the Governor has small children—and Paul and Florine wished to have them at their party next week. I had them beautifully attired, when a lady called, and I descended to the parlor, after repeated injunctions that they should remain in the nursery, and on no account soil their

apparel. After my visitor had departed, and I found leisure to look after my olive branches—where do you suppose I found them?"

A prophetic pause, which her auditors understood must not be interrupted, and the remainder of the incident related much as a judge of a criminal court might pronounce sentence of death on the condemned.

"I found them in the back yard at the chopping-block, where Mam Judy was cleaning a great fish; Paul, with a blunt knife, scraping lustily; Florine stringing the scales on thread for necklaces, with which to adorn Lola's throat, *over her blue silk dress;* Gustav had procured an old tincup, and was bringing water from the well to pour over the disgusting thing."

The fatal story of Mountain Meadow massacre could not have been recited with more thrilling horror.

"Ha! ha! ha! now they were having a good time, I say. I don't see how you could find it in your heart to spoil their pleasure," said Judge Dean, while his wife and Colonel Chapin smiled, and Bob's wide, merry eyes attested his enjoyment of the scenes presented to his mind.

"Papa, how can you say so?"—Impressively—"Though 't was only four o'clock, I banished them to their respective couches in punishment, and remanded the privilege I had given Mam Judy to go across the river on Sunday to visit her daughter, who is wedded to a jetty Adonis on the Ethridge place. She should not have encouraged my children in their disobedience. When I chid her, her only excuse was that 'It look like they was injying theyselves so, an' I done pin my handcher ober Miss Flo's dress, an' Mas Gus got on my check apun.' I threatened the children that they should forego the pleasure of their party, but I scarcely think I shall adhere to that, for some invitations have been extended."

"Yes, and I say you are wrong to tell them so; they know you will let them have it," interposed her husband, hitherto silent.

"I would not punish the little things too severely," softly plead Mrs. Dean.

"But, Esther, if I do not cause them sorely to feel the penalty of disobedience, how shall I hope to rear my offspring to be law-abiding citizens?"

The stern Martin Luther never propounded a more unanswerable "stunner."

"But, sister," timidly interposed Bob, "you don't always punish them when they do what you tell them not to."

"How do you know, little man?"

"The other day you gave Paul a dollar and a half to pay the milkman with, and he took it and bought Tommie Murrah's set of chessmen and board. I asked him yesterday what you did to him for it, and he said 'nothing,' and that his papa had said the set was well worth three dollars."

An awkward pause, then Mrs. Dean said, "You must go to bed now, son. Tell sister, and brother, and father, good-night."

"Oh, mother, I forgot! You said the other day that I must not talk much when *old* folks were present; that is the reason I must go to bed now. I *bet* I don't forget again. Good-night, everybody. I must get my poor little chicken; his eyes are shut and I am afraid he feels sick; I ought to have finished fixing his leg instead of—" Leaving his sentence incomplete, he bowed himself out at the door, holding his cheeping pet under his soft chubby chin. He felt he was being banished, but was of too stout spirit to make a display of his disappointment.

"Children propound knotty problems, which put to severe

test the skill of philosophers," sententiously observed Mrs. Chapin. "I should have pointed out to my little boy the impropriety of his conduct; but truly, I could not bear to mar his delight in his new-found treasure. It really was a beautiful set of chessmen, and I believe the toys will prove of material benefit to his mental development. The close attention necessary to a successful issue in the game cannot but be conducive to the growth of the powers of observation and calculation. Designing, as we do, to educate him for the army, this is a point unwise to ignore."

Was the subject under discussion moral discipline or the merits of a game of chess? Mrs. Chapin seems to have forgotten, but her stepmother brought back the wandering theme.

"But, if you will excuse me, dear Nettie, I will say that I think you are very wrong in allowing such a breach of good faith to go unrebuked. How can you tell when he will be able to draw a line between his own property and another's unless you teach him now?"

"But this was only a paltry hundred and fifty cents, and he knew I would have given it to him for himself had he asked."

"But he did not ask, and it was not his; nor should there be any difference in the principle of handling one hundred and fifty cents and as many dollars or thousands of dollars. I think, often, the very failure to make honest men of our boys, which you were just deploring, originates in our confusing their minds as to which are the cardinal virtues. Frequently a child is uncertain which is the greater crime, to tear his pantaloons or to tell a lie—he knows he is liable to receive reproof or punishment for either alike. In attempting to force the observance of all the commandments, we fail

to make him understand which are the weightier matters of the law, and which are only mint, anise, and cummin."

"Your theory is very unique, Esther; but unless we are willing to have our offspring grow up savages—"

"Have you read the Governor's message, Judge?" interrupted Colonel Chapin. His wife, unaccustomed to having the euphonious flow of her periods broken, turned to him in surprise and met a glance from his eyes, the significance of which she probably understood, for she folded her hands, leaned back in her chair and looked beautiful.

"I did not read the message myself, but my wife read it, and gave me the points of it," answered Judge Dean.

"What do you think of his Mexican policy?"

"About the protectorate? I think it merely a blind to divert attention from the more troublesome questions at home."

"The accounts of these incendiary fires throughout the State are most shocking," said Mrs. Chapin, shuddering.

"They are indeed; mysterious, too," assented her father.

"One cannot repose in peace for the dread apprehension of having one's slumbers rudely broken by the shrill alarm of fire rung aloud on the still air of night, being aroused to find all you hold dear in the greedy grasp of the pitiless destroyer." She covers her eyes with the beautiful hands as if to shut out the scene.

"The Indian outrages on the border are not less horrible," said Mrs. Dean.

"No; and add to these the depredations of Cortina and his desperadoes on the Rio Grande, and our State seems to be in a deplorable condition," added Judge Dean.

"Besides being in constant fear that the negroes will rise in insurrection to take the lives of those they constantly serve.

Really, I never know when I eat or drink but I am taking my last fatal potion," lamented Mrs. C.

"I think your alarm on that score is groundless," said her father. "I feel sure I have not a slave in my possession who would harm me or mine, and if threatened by danger I'd sooner call on them for succor than on many of my own color around me."

"That may be true of your negroes," replied Colonel Chapin, "while the rule would not hold good where masters are less kind and just than you. *And*, I would not depend too far on yours, for human nature is proverbially ungrateful; besides, the creatures are but the tools of abolitionary emissaries among them, inciting them to deeds of violence they would not dare attempt if left to their own timid impulses. A fellow was hung to a live-oak down at Lockhart the other day by nobody knows whom, but it is believed he was one of that ilk."

"Dear, dear, what is to become of us, papa? hardly our persons are safe, to make no mention of our property." The quavering appeal in Mrs. Chapin's voice was piteous.

Esther Dean spoke softly—"In God is my refuge and my glory. The rock of my strength and my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times: ye people pour out your heart before Him. God is a refuge for us." Her husband laid his hand on her arm in a mute caress of appreciation and indorsement; but Mrs. Chapin answered:—

"That is very well for our souls, and perhaps it may even include our perishing bodies, but it is no security for our filthy lucre. I confess my chief solicitude is about my property, endangered by these perilous times."

"Now, Mrs. Dean, can you not give my mercenary wife another Scripture about 'being old and once young, and

never seeing the righteous forsaken or his seed begging bread?' " laughingly said Colonel Chapin.

"But," interposed his wife, "I do not profess to be satisfied with bread, and I fervently hope never to realize a hint of want."

Then ensued one of those lengthened, significant pauses, which sometimes occur when it is felt that a deeper matter lies behind the words spoken, and that those words, though interesting enough in themselves, are mere blazes on the path which leads into the broader road of plain speaking. Finally Colonel Chapin lunges into the main road.

"Have you talked with your wife about the matter I mentioned to you this afternoon, Judge?"

"Yes."

Faces cloud.

"Well?"

"Esther thinks as I do about it. 'T would be unjust to divert our capital from its legitimate channel. Those who have deposited their money with us are, many of them, poor; some of them are women who have sewed, have kept boarders, have taught children for it; if we withhold it from them when they demand it, even for a week, it may involve them in serious difficulty, if not in pecuniary trouble. The mental anxiety, the loss of confidence in human nature and the overruling care of kind Providence; the souring and saddening of heart; the stirred tumult of angry passions in the breast of my fellow-creatures which would result from such a step, I am not willing as a Christian man to be responsible for at the bar of a just God, who loves the poor and condemns the usurer."

The Judge's fine face was grand now, as he laid a strong, well-knit hand on either knee, and turned again to the fire.

"But, papa, the injustice would only be seeming; and we cannot be held responsible, in the sight of Heaven, for wrongs that we only *seem* to have created."

"The wrong would *not* be seeming. The present only is in our hands. If we suspend to-morrow, we cannot know when we can resume, for our dependence is upon money coming in, which may be interrupted on its way to our hands in the same manner. Somebody who owes us may suspend, too; we are all rows of bricks, set up one against another. Besides, if it *were* only wrong in appearance, I shall never consent to go, open-eyed, into a thing that *seems* to be wrong."

"Still, papa, does not your duty to your family require you to look to their interest, too? Talking of Christianity"—Mrs. Chapin is too much in earnest now to give heed to the euphony of her periods—"the very Bible you are fond of exalting, says that a man who provides not for his own family is worse than an infidel, or something to that effect."

Her father smiled as he answered—"Edward Garrett has fitly said, 'If a right thing is to be done, and we seem to have to pass through a wrong thing on our way to it, depend upon it there 's another way, and a better way, and it 's our fault, and not God's, that we do not find it.'"

Silence again. Colonel Chapin stretches his lips and finally says: "Well, you may be right, Judge, as you generally are upon questions of equity. Still, I regret very much not to be able to get the handling of that Cordina lien on the ranche. It certainly promises to be one of the best hits in trade that has come our way lately, or is likely to again, soon. For if we get run down in this panic, capitalists will give us the go-by, and take their speculations to houses less scrupulous than we, but wiser in their generation."

Judge Dean, with clouded brow, studies the fire.

His partner tries again. "If we could, by any means, get that into our hands, why, 't would give us a rise, and draw attention to our business enterprise, just about the right time. I believe we can go through without an actual break, for our collaterals are sound, and we could raise some money on their strength. There is no doubt about the value of the property offered as security for this Cordina loan, and the beef will be in market by the fifteenth of April or first of May. The drive of marketable beef last year brought nineteen thousand seven hundred dollars. I have inquired carefully into the figures. There will be more and better meat this year; we are perfectly safe in estimating it at twenty thousand."

"Then, if so valuable, why has Van Dusen suffered it to be covered by a mortgage for seventeen thousand?"

"It was a gambling debt—sort of an affair of honor. But the mortgage calls for twenty-five thousand, and covers property worth fifty. It is Cordina that offers it for seventeen, because he is compelled to have that amount of money right now, and the claim does not mature for three months. But he must have it to-morrow."

The Judge rising, stands with his back to the fire, stroking his chin, and thinking. He looks down at his wife, but she is crocheting, and does not see.

"Well, Colonel, if you think it so good a trade, I can raise the required amount in the city here, and secure it on my unincumbered real estate."

An ominous pause, while some brains work and pulses beat like trip-hammers. The dilated pupils of Annetta's eyes, half hidden by drooping lids, glint with a feline light. Colonel Chapin hardly breathes as he answers quietly, not eagerly:

"Yes, that can be done; G. G. Morgan would let us have

it at twelve per cent. for six months, on good security. There would be no risk; for, beside the mortgage maturing, there are half a dozen other sources from which we will have the money in six months."

"Well, then," the Judge speaks easily, as though relieved of a burden, "I don't see anything to hinder the trade being made in the morning. As you say, it will do our house good to be taking in cash heavily a few months from now. I will come down town at eight in the morning, and we will get the papers fixed up. There is little good in having Texas land if you can't trade with it."

"I expect you will have to put in the city lots and improvements, too," cautiously suggested Colonel Chapin.

"That's all right. It doesn't matter to me. Anything, except our home; that is Esther's, and shall never be touched by any business transaction."

"You are right; and there is no need for it in this instance. Well, Judge, I think you will be glad of this six months hence. Come, Annetta, it is ten o'clock; let us go," and he slapped the knees of his black cloth pants, and stretched his legs as with satisfaction.

"How the hours slip by! Papa, with his sound reasoning, and Esther's pure morality give Mercury's silver sandals to Father Time, and we are beguiled into utter ignorance of his flight." She gathers her wraps about her, makes her loving, graceful adieus, and they are gone.

Judge Dean and his wife discuss the point of business a little, then, banishing it from their minds, commit their way unto Heaven, and rest in peace, unconscious that Fate had even now mixed her darkest pigment with which to dash the canvas of their lives.

CHAPTER III.

THE RESULT.

"Oh, when strong natures into frailer ones
Have struck deep root, if one exalt not both,
Both must drag down and perish."

MAN is made for disappointment. Next morning, Judge Dean, instead of going to his business earlier than usual, was unable to leave his bed, for he was seriously ill. He sent Bob with a note to his partner, who responded immediately in person, and was admitted to the sick man's chamber, where he found the sufferer in much pain, and very impatient of the necessary confinement imposed on him.

"Colonel, you will have to get the mortgage written out, and bring it for my signature. Oh, dear, dear! Esther, look in my cabinet, in the left hand drawer at the top, and give me the bundle of deeds. Ah, me!"

"You seem to be in great pain, Judge. What is the trouble do you think?"

"Pain in my chest and side, fever too, headache, backache, boneache—that's it, wife. Colonel, look them over; I can't. The Bell Co. tract? yes. Are the field notes there? all right. Now, the city lots—yes—ah, me! I wish you would stop on your way down and send the doctor up. You'll be back soon?"

The necessary papers were written without delay; but Colonel Chapin went to his office before returning to his father-in-law; he wanted to see how matters were going at the bank. Bad enough to judge from the anxious faces of the people who dropped in every few moments with their

credit books to draw out their deposits; some making excuse of bad luck or debts to pay; some boldly announcing that they intended to keep what they had themselves until times were more settled.

Colonel Chapin did not go into the outer office, but watched the comers and goers from his private room, while he tried to collect his thoughts, and prepare some expedient for the possible emergency of the cash on hand not holding out to meet the demand.

"Judge Dean's honest policy will come near ruining us, I'm afraid; anyway, I'm glad I got his consent to this trade. If I could get the whole affair in my own hands, as Annetta suggests"—he chews his beard and deliberates with deep wrinkles between his eyes—"I might—hum—it would n't look just fair, but I would see him righted in the end. The old man is going to have a tight pull to go through this spell—it looks like inflammation of the lungs. If he should die I would n't be surprised we broke flat; then 'twould be a good thing to have something outside the firm capital. I could handle the business better in my own name, and really do more for him and his; for I have his true interest at heart, certainly; but he is getting old and timid.—What will you have, Romer?" this to his cashier, who waited to speak.

"Colonel, there is a man here who wants to draw out four thousand dollars immediately. He is a cattle dealer, and his money has been here about two months." Speaking low, he continued, "I'm afraid we have n't got it, but did n't tell him so. I asked if he could wait for part of it until to-morrow, and he swore and said he must have it all 'spot cash.'"

"I 'll go in and see him," said the banker. Entering the

outer office he found a fierce-looking Texan, whose dusty hair floating far down over his shoulders, buckskin "overalls" and gauntlets, Mexican "sombrera," and jingling spurs, as well as the "six-shooters" stuck in his leathern belt, bespoke the cattle ranchero, as plainly as did the dare-devil self-esteem flashing from beneath the shaggy brows.

"See here, sir!" he called, as soon as Colonel Chapin appeared, "I want my money. Yo' fellah there wants to make me wait till to-morrer, but they ain't no wait in my craw. I 'm a hair-trigger man, I am, and I want my money. Hands got to be paid to-night—they are waiting here, and have n't had half a drink apiece yet. Kin I git it?"

This was not really a question, though in the form of one, but was rather said as one pugilistic lad might ask another, "Do you take it back?" when he knows he will take a sound thrashing first.

Colonel Chapin answered quietly and politely: "There has been a good deal of uneasiness in business circles for the last two days, and we have paid out large sums of money. Our stock is low this morning. We are looking for a heavy draft by the three o'clock mail, and if you will call again at three-thirty you can have your whole amount." This was a venturesome statement, but anything to gain time.

"Well, if I git it this evenin' it 'll do; but if I don't, 't wont be healthy in here," and dragging his jingling spurs on the floor he strode out.

Colonel Chapin turned to enter his private office again.

"Colonel, I wish you could stay in here to-day. People are getting troublesome, and they have more confidence if they can see the 'boss' himself."

"I 'll be in after a little, Romer."

When he reached his desk he found his wife seated there

reading over the deeds and mortgages. A low-toned, earnest conversation ensued between them, in which the woman seemed to take the lead, her husband looking puzzled and reluctant. Finally they leave the office together. In an hour he returns to find Messrs. Cordina and De Leon awaiting him. Their mutual business is soon transacted and the borrowers depart.

The vicinity of the post-office is crowded, densely packed at three o'clock. As it is always a place of resort at mail-time, this fact is not worthy of special note. But to-day there is a craving eagerness in the faces of men awaiting the opening of the delivery-doors. Those who have lock-boxes take out their matter, many opening and reading their letters as they move out.

Standing a little apart from the thickest of the crowd is the "ranchero" creditor of Chapin & Co., with hands in his pockets. His chief employment seems to be to drag the silver rowel of his left spur over the dirty floor, and listen to the music of its jingle; but in reality he is giving close heed to the talk of two loungers near him. Lounger number one is a true specimen of the genus—nothing but a lounger—one of those ubiquitous creatures who knows everybody and his business. Number two is a gossipy tradesman, who really expects letters, but has no objection to hearing the town news while he waits.

Number One—"That is Romer, Chapin & Dean's cashier; he is in a hurry; oh, yes, he'll get his right away; lock box."

They watch him open his box and take out letters and papers, a good many too. He glances over them and passes out.

Number Two—"That firm does a heavy business. I consider them the solidest house in town. I always deposit with them when I have anything in hand. Both clever men."

Ranchero stops dragging his spur and listens, while his face clears.

Number One—"They are having a tight pull now, though. They 've done nothing for three days but pay out. Times are so skeery."

Number Two—"Yes; but they will pull through, won't they?"

Number One—"Don't know so well about it. I don't think that fellow got the letters he wanted just now. He looked sorter pale about the gills, I thought. Understand Chapin got a pile of money from Morgan to-day; and Sowfsky, clerk in the Recorder's office, told my wife at dinner—you know he boards at our house—that Dean had given a mortgage on a lot of real estate, and Chapin was in an awful swivet to have it recorded to-day; said it had to be done before business hours closed. Don't exactly see through it; but there 's bound to be a hitch somewhere when the old Judge ties up his real estate. Whatever it is, he takes it pretty hard; I hear he 's gone to bed over it. It will come out though, and we shall see."

Number Two—"Indeed! I hope no bad luck will befall them. Chapin is a nice man; and he has got the prettiest woman for a wife that I ever set eyes on."

Number One—"Yes; she knows how to put on the silks and diamonds. But old man Dean's little wife is worth twenty of her. She is a woman in a thousand."

Number Two—"I believe I 'll not wait any longer. I will come back after awhile. Good-day."

Number One—"Á Deos!"

Number Two goes directly to Chapin & Co., and draws out his little deposit: though Chapin & Co. are both clever men, and he likes them, he can't afford to risk his little pile with them when they are thought "skeery."

Ranchero jingles to a convenient corner to watch the bank doors until it is half-past three. Then he jingles into the room and stops squarely before the cash window.

"My money ready?"

Romer looks nervous.

"Your money. Let me see. How much was it?"

"Four thousand dollars in gold. Every cent I got from my last drive. You have n't forgot, though you try to look like you had."

"I 'll see Colonel Chapin." He disappeared to return in a moment. "He has gone out. Can you wait till morning?"

"No, by ——! I can't. The fellah told me to come here at three-thirty and I could have it, and I 'm here at three-thirty, and I am going to have it or have somebody's brains. He is not gone either, and you can tell him so. You are the cash man and can get it for me without him, and you had better do it pretty quick. What do you want? Mind who you jostle when you are among gentlemen." Turning, he saw it was a policeman who had touched him. His right hand went to the pistol in his belt; then, seeing there were three of the law officers he stopped.

"You must make no threats here, sir. Bank hours are over; see, the window is shut. Now if you will be quiet and make no threats I will not arrest you. You can come back in the morning and attend to your business."

They moved out of the room with him, and the bank doors closed ponderously behind them, shutting out other eager, anxious-faced men. Ranchero made no further resistance,

but jingled away in the crowd. Yet there was a smouldered fire in his eyes that boded no good to the men who had thwarted him.

Five o'clock is Mrs. Chapin's dinner hour. The table has waited twenty minutes, and the lady is very impatient for her husband to come. She is more than usually anxious this afternoon, for there are many things she desires to talk with him about. Six o'clock! The winter night has come down. Dinner is spoiled. Seven o'clock! The patience of the beautiful mistress is exhausted, when there comes a ring at the door. She is too restless to wait for a servant to answer the summons; she opens the door herself, and ushers in four strong men, *bearing her dead husband on a stretcher.* Romer comes with them and states that the banker had waited until after six, before leaving his office, arranging the books and papers with him. He had not been gone a moment from the private door of his office when two pistol reports rang out in quick succession. He ran out, but it was raining slightly and the air full of mist; it was already dark, so he could not clearly see the figure, dashing away on a horse, down the street past him. When he reached his prostrate employer life was already extinct, for his brains had literally been blown out.

Mrs. Chapin did not shriek nor faint, though she loved her husband, but led the way into his bed-room and called his waiting-man. Then requesting Romer to attend to all necessary matters, and to call on her at his earliest leisure, she shut herself in her private room, away from her little, screaming, terrified children.

Two days afterward, and the funeral is over. Chapin & Co. have suspended and made assignment. The assignees are to take possession to-morrow. Judge Dean is very low; so ill

that he seems to know but little that transpires around him. But his wife understands that the blow falls heavily on his proud heart, and she leaves him not an instant, no, not even to go to Annetta, in her trouble. Poor, poor Annetta! so worldly, so fond of her money, with no trust in her Heavenly Guardian to sustain her now, no trust in anything except her own beauty and riches, and her murdered husband. Poor, poor Annetta! Esther Dean's gentle heart bleeds for her, but she has little time to think. Her husband's feverish eyes watch her, and seem to find no rest save on her sweet face. Bob sits beside his bed, occasionally doing little services in the sick-room, for he is very handy; his mother is often sick, and when suffering loves to have the chubby brown hands about her.

In the afternoon the Judge is much better, and insists on sending for Romer to see him. His wife remonstrates, but he will not be denied, saying he will be quieter when he understands how his business stands. So Romer comes.

There is no doubt, he tells him, that it is a clear case of bankruptcy. The sale of cotton in New Orleans was on a low market, and they lost heavily. Numerous other bills fall due and there is no money to meet them. The collaterals are of no present value, thrown upon a timid, disturbed market.

The lien on the Van Dusen ranche—could it not be made to realize something? *The lien on the Van Dusen ranche was made in Annetta Chapin's individual name, and the firm assignees cannot touch it.*

Judge Dean turns cold to his very heart; but he only tightens his grasp on his wife's hand, which is tenderly holding his, and says slowly: "In Annetta Chapin's name! And I have trusted that man for twenty years!"

"There is something I cannot understand about it, Judge.

Colonel Chapin certainly did not intend to do you any injustice. In the last talk I had with him, the same hour he was killed, he said he would be compelled to suspend next day, but hated like death to do it on your account. He hoped to resume in a few days. I feared some foul play about that lien, and examined the papers closely, but they were in his own handwriting, and all in legal order. As I said, I don't understand it. There are about two thousand dollars in gold in the safe, which he put in a bag and told me to bring up to you that night after business hours, saying you would need it for personal expenses until the firm got under headway again. The events of the hour prevented me from doing it, and you have been too sick to be disturbed since. I knew if I brought it I would have to talk to you a good deal, and I was afraid it would not be good for you; but the money is in his private drawer, and will not be touched; I can bring it up to-night. Mrs. Chapin asked for the key and combination this afternoon, saying there were some strictly private and individual papers in it that she wanted before the assignees came in. I went down with her and opened the safe and left her there. You know she is up to the points in the business as much, nearly, as he was—Colonel always advised with her. But no one else is in the bank now, and I would like to return as soon as possible, if you will excuse me. Mrs. Chapin told me she would not remain in Austin after she could get her affairs arranged to leave."

Judge Dean lay with his eyes shut, seemingly giving little attention to Romer's talk. 'T was the stillness produced by a shock which stuns the sensibilities.

Romer had not been gone an hour when a messenger came with a letter to Judge Dean from his daughter.

"DEAR FATHER:—It is useless to spend words in discussing the deplorable state of our affairs. You will act as the true and brave always do—live through it and rise above it. I will also act out my nature—the moral coward, and run away from what I am not strong nor honest enough to bear. You know now of the act which would seem to cover the heretofore honorable name of my dead husband with shame. Of course I refer to the V. D. mortgage. I cannot suffer the ignominy to rest upon him. You have always trusted him, while you have known me from my infancy that I am not honest when it is to my interest to be a knave. I assume the whole opprobrium of that deed. Erwin only did it at my solicitation, and because I told him you would throw the value of the lien into the bank stock to save your creditors, and we would, none of us, get any good from it. I promised him to make it over to you again as soon as the affairs were settled, and he believed me. But you will be able to see at a glance that I cannot do without it now—it is my only fortune. I tell you this that you may clear him in your mind of any duplicity. He *was* an honest man. I have also taken out of the drawer the two thousand dollars cash he put there for you. You will be able to get along without it, while I cannot. I will take my children and servants and leave for New Orleans this evening—this is sent you after I am gone—and I will never come back. I leave my house, furniture, and so forth, at your disposal—they certainly will be worth something. Of course, people will not think strange that I should desire to leave the scene of the events of the past two days as soon as possible. I would like to see you and tell you farewell, but I feel 't would be adding insult to injury. I hope you will forget your unworthy daughter. I know you will forgive her, though she bring down your gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. But Bob will be a blessing to your old age; he has an honest mother, and I have heard I never had.

"Farewell.

"ANNETTA."

But Judge Dean did not live down the difficulties which beset him; for the Fates had measured his span of life. His

sixty years were the Clotho who drew out the slender fibre; his financial troubles the Lachesis who turned the last revolution of the quivering wheel of fortune; and the heartless ingratitude of his child the Atropis who clipped life's finished thread. And so he died; and after he was gone they found there was nothing left for his patient wife and brave boy but poverty and strong will to do, wedded to a sure trust in the God of the universe. But Mrs. Dean had many friends, and this fair city of Texas then, as now, offered a quick and keen appreciation of pluck, independence, and merit. She rented her a little home, gathered her a music class, and fed and clothed and reared her boy, educating him not only in the classics and sciences, but instilling into his very being that cardinal virtue his father had esteemed the jewel of manhood,—truth in word, thought, deed.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME PROSPECTS.

THE thread of my story now brings us to the village of C——, in the county of Milam, nearly in the centre of Texas. Time, November, 1877, at four in the afternoon. Weather, gray and chilly, with a blustering norther ruling the elements. Labor would be wasted in saying the sidewalks of the town were unpaved; for paved streets in the cities of Texas are, even yet, few and far between, as the denizens thereof will bear me witness in saying. The particular walk with which we need now to become acquainted was not beside anything save a rude rail fence, so we will not call it a

sidewalk; it was worse than unpaved, for it was two-and-a-half inches deep in loose sand, which yielded to the feet of the pedestrian, making him realize that all smooth roads are not easy to travel; moreover, the rank Jamestown weeds had, during the fervid summer, grown to majestic proportions, and on either side encroached upon the narrow path, forbidding aught but single-file promenade, and even then occasionally bearing triumphant pennon of fringe or flounce. This was an out-of-the-way street, leading to the boys' academy, now for some months untenanted, and remote from the trade centre. Upon this crooked and narrow path strode Bob Dean with aggressive steps and quick; nor did the sand yield overmuch to his feet, for they were broad and never tardy. He had passed through the weeds and reached firmer, higher ground, when he reached the corner, where an untrimmed Bois d'Arc hedge began.

"I beg your pardon, Miss! I—I—the wind is blowing so, and I was n't looking; really, I did n't think of meeting anyone. Pray, excuse my rudeness."

"Certainly; it was purely accidental; but I believe my music is gone."

"Excuse me—I will recover it."

Easier said than done. The young lady, half laughing, looked ruefully at the flying sheets whirled down the street by the mad wind. The incipient smile was well developed as she watched Bob pursuing the fugitive leaves and making vain attempts to capture them.

"That must be the new schoolmaster; I heard he had come. The wind has blown me out of all order, and of course I am blushing like a school-girl—though I believe they don't blush now—at any rate *I* do, which is my misfortune. He looks as awkward as I feel—that is consoling. But he is coming back."

Now we all know how undignified one feels when trying to regain some object which the wind keeps just beyond our reach. Bob Dean was forcibly reminded of the Quaker, who, under like circumstances, handed a quarter to a bystander, with the request that he "would *swear* the worth of that at yonder *blessed* hat." Bob did not make a practice of swearing, and there was no one by except a very pretty girl; so when the sheets had at last reached the tall weeds, and were stopped in their wild career, he had only to make the best of his way back, endeavoring to smooth his ruffled dignity as well as the crumpled music.

"I believe this is all, Miss," said he, arranging the leaves, and restoring them to the old portfolio which he took from her hand, at the same time glancing at the name printed on the cover. "Let me see—'Lucia di Lammermoor'—there is only one page here, and there ought to be ten—where can the others be?"—his dark eyes scanning the weedy road. "I see no more."

"Oh, it matters not," said the lady, looking up in surprise that he should show familiarity with the composition; for it was not a common one, and was above the grade generally affected by society men. What wonderful eyes! they dazzled him so he forgot to speak until she had murmured, "Thanks; good afternoon!" and stowing her portfolio under her left arm, while her right endeavored to restrain her wind-whipped skirts to a semblance of order, she pursued her way down the path he had just traversed.

Bob Dean was returning from the academy to his boarding-place, his square chin tucked in his overcoat-collar, and his hat pulled over his eyes to shield his clean-shaven face from the cutting winter blast. With his hands in his pockets, and his mind on the new work before him among the rude boys

of a Texas village, he had no thought of who might be coming down the other side of the block, until he had run full against this young woman, nearly overthrowing her, and, in the effort to save her from a fall, had knocked her book out of her hand. After she passed, he stood, spite of the wind, to look after her.

"Wonder *who* she is. Mary Lipscomb is the name on her portfolio. How she did blush! I expect I blushed too. What an awkward blunder! Pretty introduction among the young ladies of C——. Would n't mother laugh! ha! ha!"

Just here the lady turned to look back at him, whereupon they both repeated the easy feat of blushing, and immediately hastened to resume their diverse ways.

When Bob reached his boarding-place, after transacting some necessary business in the town, he found the family assembled at the tea-table, not waiting; Mrs. Brown never waited for anybody, neither did she keep people waiting. If the pert little clock over the mantle were to strike six, in the winter, before the tea was poured out, it would be so astonished at its own temerity 't would be certain to put its hands over its face. His landlady was a buxom, black-eyed little matron, who prided herself on being "forehanded." It was her boast that her meals were dished up before her neighbors' kitchen chimneys were smoking; but her thrift did not manifest itself in a stinted board. The Browns were "well to do in the world," and only took an occasional boarder because the family was small and they liked the company; moreover, the one hotel of the village did not maintain a good reputation for either fare or patronage; and so, when a stranger of the better class came for more than a temporary stay, the private families of the place considered it a Christian duty to take him in. Mrs. Brown's house was a favorite, and when

Bob Dean had inquired of one of the school committee, who had installed him in his work, for a good boarding-place, he had been unhesitatingly recommended to "try Mrs. Brown," and was furthermore informed that he might consider himself lucky if he got in there. "She keeps good fare, good fires, good beds, and," he added with a wink, "it does not matter so much whether you pay up punctually or not, if you make *love* to suit her girl."

Bob thought he could manage that part. Not that he expected to be delinquent on pay-day, nor did he care to make love simply *pour passer le temps*, but he knew how to render himself agreeable to a young lady, and would enjoy, exceedingly, one in the house. And, he considered further, if he should become interested to a degree of tenderness, what odds? he was twenty-six years old, and it was time he should be falling in love in earnest, provided his "girl" would wait till he was ready to marry, which would be some years first. Really he believed he would be able to work harder, and with more steadiness of purpose, when he knew for what sort of woman he was working. That there was to be a woman in the question he never paused to consider; that was a settled fact. His life had been too busy for the forming of many friendships, and he had never known but one woman well. An intimate knowledge of his mother's pure motives and singleness of purpose, had placed her sex upon a high pedestal of honor in the mind of her admiring son. He did not deem it weak to give to her a devotion which was both tender and chivalrous. Their circumstances had accustomed them to measure their expenditures by their narrow purse, and few luxuries had been in their lot. So they had learned to take comfort in each other. She was to him friend, confidant, sister, as well as mother. And he—well, she loved him as a

tender-hearted woman *would* love an only son, when he is worthy of the best love. What more could I say to tell the depths of her heart? They had been but little separated up to this time. After her husband's death, when poverty had taken the place of the easy affluence he had loved to surround her with, Esther Dean had gone to work patiently, with a settled purpose, to educate her boy fully. But her little body was frail, and had not strength for much work, so Bob had to do many things to add to their slender means; sometimes it was sawing and storing wood for a neighbor, or driving a milk- or bread-cart, or working a garden; afterwards, copying for the public offices. One year, when neither were in good health, they had rented a little farm in the country, and he plowed and reaped like a veritable son of the soil, while she tended the garden and poultry, and sent their spoils to town to market. While this discipline was good for mind and body, it had retarded his literary education, and he was twenty-one before they were able to go to college. I said they, for she could not dream of giving him up for so long; so she went with him and kept a home, and boarded other students to pay their expenses. After he graduated, he attended a medical school two terms, for he had never resigned the purpose, formed in childhood, to be a surgeon. Then their money gave out, and he had sought and obtained the position as teacher in the boys' school at C—— to make more. He left his mother in Austin, where she had many friends and a little work; but only until something could be done to get her with him again—he did not know what, but he would be on the lookout.

They had never met Annetta Chapin since the tragical events that had brought about their separation. Only once had they heard from her directly. Then, she wrote that she

had been married again to a very rich old man who had not a relative in the world. He had settled on her a handsome fortune, and she really could spare something without feeling its loss; so, if they were in needy circumstances, (which she hoped was not the case; for one so worthy as Esther Dean would surely never be suffered by a just Providence to want,) why, if they would let her know their need, she would send them a liberal remittance from time to time.

The few moments which followed the reading of this epistle was the only time Bob could ever remember to have seen his gentle little mother genuinely angry, and he believed this unscrupulous, proud daughter of her dead husband to be the only creature living towards whom she cherished unkind feelings. She had never forgiven her for the unkind blow which she believed had cost her her husband's life, and they never mentioned her name between them. They had received no favor from her, and Bob shut her memory out of his cheery heart; feeling that he had to cut his own way in the world, he just hewed away at the block of fortune with lusty blows.

But while we have been talking about him, he has been waiting for his supper. A glance at the table is sufficient to make one impatient, even if he had not, like our hero, taken his midday meal from a lunch-basket in the turmoil of school-boys let loose from tasks.

Snowy linen and shining silver are the setting for the cheering vision of smoking steaks, rosy slices of cold boiled ham, flaky biscuit, golden corn-cakes, yellow butter (a big plate of it), amber honey, and home-made pickles and sweets, with the fragrant accompaniment of steaming tea and coffee.

Doubtless you will question my taste in mentioning the fact concerning him, but Bob was just the man to appreciate this

view of life. He must have a large physical nature who attains a healthy, permanent amplitude of mental growth or executive ability, and this nature is the outgrowth, other hygienic laws duly regarded, of liberal feeding. So I repeat it, and having made my point, consider no apology for him necessary, that Bob Dean took a satisfactory view of the table in far less time than we have spent over it. Indeed, he had little leisure to spare, for Mrs. Brown was introducing him to Miss Jennie Brown, her daughter, the only other occupant of the supper-room at present.

I will tell you how she looks now, that we may not need to stop in the midst of the conversation to do so, for Mrs. Brown and her daughter are both good talkers. Should you have to wait long to see her you would lose much, though you will constantly be finding out new lights in which to view her beauty.

Low, full forehead, around which clustered short curls, silky and black, which had received an extra touch in honor of the new boarder. Great dusky eyes, which snapped when she talked. Rich, dark skin, with abundant color in the smooth cheeks and pretty passionate lips. Plump and trim as a robin in form, and fully as graceful.

"Right pretty little girl, with fun in her, too," was Bob's mental conclusion. But oh, the fickleness of a man's fancy! His next thought was, "I wonder how Miss Lipscomb would look out of the wind, with her face its natural color."

"Well, how do you like the prospects here, Mr. Dean?" said Mrs. Brown, handing him his tea.

"Do you mean the town's prospects or mine, Mrs. Brown?"

"Well, I don't know. Either, I suppose," she answered, laughing.

"Both," suggested Miss Jennie.

"Taken together or separately?" he inquired, turning to her with mock seriousness.

"Separate as far as they differ, and then you may view them together." She was not to be outdone right at the beginning of their acquaintance.

"To be exact, I have not seen very much of the town yet. The business square looks very dull and rather dirty."

"Mondays and Tuesdays are always dull, especially at this season, when everybody is busy picking and ginning their cotton," said Mrs. Brown, anxious to exonerate her town from so opprobrious a charge. "Saturday is the busy day here."

"Unfortunately, I arrived on Monday, and have only had Tuesday as yet to view it in," returned Bob.

"Well, and the other prospects?" reminded Jennie, with a gleam of fun in her eyes.

"The trees are beautiful in their autumnal colors, as though tinged with the pencil of art. The streets are very sandy and weedy, and the wind high," and Bob laughed as he thought of the accident these combined elements had brought about for him.

"You seem to enjoy *that* prospect. Any more?" Jennie persisted with answering smile.

"Jennie, don't tease, child; Mr. Dean will think you are too inquisitive," said her mother, not quite able to understand the turn the conversation had taken.

"Not at all, madam; I like to be questioned; it develops the powers of observation and facility of defining. Being a teacher, it becomes an every-day matter to me to be questioned." He did not think it necessary to bestow the information on them that this was his first day's experience in that line.

"I should think you would get tired enough of it all day long, without having one put between every mouthful of your supper. Mattie!" this in a shrill call to the young lady of color, who had disappeared into the kitchen. "Why don't you stay in here where you are wanted. Bring some more batter-cakes."

"I am waiting for some more prospects," said Jennie.

"You shall have all *I* have taken in. My school-room was very noisy, full, and promising, to say nothing of being cold."

"Do you like that one?"

"The last? not very well; but I shall mend it to-morrow. I stopped at town to order a damper in the stove-pipe and a load of wood. The first part I do like. I think it promising, because it is noisy, and noisy because it's full, and the fuller it is the more promising my prospects."

"The committee ought to have had the wood there before the school opened," said Mrs. Brown, whose mind was of a practical turn. "When Mr. Brown's at home he always attends to it; but he has n't been home any of week-days lately. I should have thought Mr. Gooch would have done it; but I reckon they thought it was uncertain about your coming—we have been disappointed so often about getting a good teacher."

"They did not know me nor appreciate my promising prospects," said he, looking solemn.

"Well, the next one," said Jennie.

"The next one is this tea-table, which I can no longer consider promising, since the greater part of its merits have been already tested, and proved to be no delusion. Shall I help you to honey, thereby allowing you to participate in my 'sweet prospects'?"

"How unpoetical, Mr. Dean, to blend your views of na-

ture and art with the food you eat!" and Jennie shook her curls and shut her eyes, thus enhancing the effect of their blackness when reopened and "fired" at her companion the next minute. He appreciated the effect, as he laughingly responded,

"Oh, no! Miss Brown; do you not know that,

'We may live without poetry, music, and art;
We may live without conscience, and live without heart;
We may live without friends, live without books,
But civilized man cannot live without cooks.
He may live without books; what is knowledge but grieving?
He may live without hope; what is hope but deceiving?
He may live without love; what is passion but pining?
But where is the man that can live without dining?'

"If you will not stop to question the taste of so lengthy a quotation, you will readily perceive that one's food cannot be unpoetical, when such good and true poetry has been written about it."

An appreciative laugh from mother and daughter, then said the latter, "I acknowledge defeat. Well, are there any more *prospects?*"

"Yourself is the last, which, I hope you will pardon me for saying, I consider the most promising of all,"—a low bow as he rises from the table—"unless I may add the future one of much enjoyment in improving an acquaintance so pleasantly begun."

He opened the door for her to pass out.

"Will you come into the parlor? You must not make a recluse of yourself," she said, as she saw that he was about to ascend the stairs to his room on the second floor.

"Thanks, but I must deny myself the pleasure this evening,

Miss Brown. I have a letter to write for the morning mail," and bowing again he left her.

Jennie's under lip took on a more perceptible pout as she shut herself into the parlor.

"Cool and dignified," she said, going up to the fire, and pushing the forestick with the toe of her little shoe—an ugly habit she had when excited. "I'll engage the time will come when he will be glad to come into *my* parlor *without* an invitation. He is *so* good-looking; fresh and honest. I wish I could say as much for somebody else I like better than I want any one to know. I wonder what the doctor will think of his being here. Guess it will put him to thinking. I saw him looking at Mary Lipscomb last Sunday, like there was n't anybody else worth"—a glance in the mirror over the mantle finished the sentence. A sparkle in the big eyes and a firm setting of the ripe lips; then resting her pretty head on the plump hands clinging to the mantle-shelf, she looked long into the fire, while the soliloquy went on—

"Mr. Dean is just spl-l-lendid. I'll warrant he could love hard. Wonder if there would not be comfort in being loved by a man who thought more of you than of himself?" Her lips soften, and take on a pitiful, childish look; then just as you might expect to see tears drop from the now tender eyes, another change sweeps over the expressive face, and she wheels off to the open piano, saying,

"I am *so* lonesome to-night. I wish my sweetheart would come. Well, since that delectable young gentleman up-stairs would not come in and talk to me, he shall not write, if noise will hinder him," and she runs through a pretty little fantasia, in bad time, but with sweet expression.

Bob Dean had seated himself before his own fire, with writing material spread on the table at his elbow. He had

not written to his mother since his arrival, and he must be sure to tell her everything, for he had promised to write her such letters that she should know his life as it was. He wished she could see how comfortable his surroundings were, and how pleasant people his new friends promised to be. Just now the sound of the piano in the room below brought to his mind the subject of music in general, and the truant notes of the afternoon in particular. He could see again the lovely, blushing girl he had so nearly knocked down on his heedless homeward walk; he was interested in the lady beyond his usual habit, and could account for it only on the ground that he should like to be better acquainted, in order to demonstrate to her that his accidental rudeness was not habitual. Writing to his mother of the circumstance, he said:

"I only wish I could make you see how she looked as she tried to keep back the laughter in her face when I returned from my scamper down the street. She controlled her mouth pretty well; but her eyes—such eyes! all the sunshine of a June day prisoned in the purest drop of the brightest nook of our dear, blue Colorado, could no more than match them. I can only say that I want immensely to see them again,—and really I believe etiquette would suggest that I call and offer apology, and replace the music I was the cause of her losing. Inclination nods assent; so will you kindly send me a copy by the very first mail; I inclose on a card the name of the piece, and think you will find it among our collection —not what we have used lately, but perhaps in the old stand in the corner;—be sure it is all there—ten pages, as I happen to remember. If it is not there, please get it for me as soon as possible. Now if I should become unduly interested in this young lady, and should develop a genuine 'strong passion,' you cannot say I *fell* in love; for I *walked* in blindfolded—my hat was over my eyes; but don't be uneasy, little mother; I shall never love her nor any other woman better than you until you see her, judge her, and bid me 'go and be happy.'"

Thus it is; men jest of things which Fate holds in her portentous hand, and make promises they have no power to fulfil or to leave undone.

But Bob had finished his letter now; folded, sealed, stamped it, and laid it in the left breast-pocket of his overcoat. Then, opening his trunk, he brought out some dry-looking books on surgery—he had not come here to devote himself to school-teaching exclusively—and stretching out his stout legs to the warmth of the fire, he was soon as oblivious to surrounding circumstances as if there were no charmingly pretty girls within a league of him.

CHAPTER V.

THOSE LAUGHING EYES.

"The light of love, the purity of grace,
The mind, the music breathing from her face;
The heart, whose softness harmonized the whole,
And, oh! that eye was in itself a soul."

FOUR o'clock of Friday afternoon found Bob Dean at Mrs. Lipscomb's gate. The desired music had arrived promptly in the afternoon mail, and he lost no time in delivering it; for he had not found his desire to see the laughing eyes grow less as the days went by. He had been lonely and homesick during the week. On the morning after his first meeting with Miss Jennie Brown she had gone on a visit to a friend in Rockdale, and had not yet returned. Her mother had entertained a neuralgic tendency, and was not sociable; so he had found no companion but his work. He had been

used always to having his mother's company of evenings, and had hardly learned yet to do without the sight of her sympathetic face across the table when at his night work. But he had a precious letter from her this afternoon, and was cheered thereby. Then, Miss Jennie would be home to-night; besides, here he was looking at Miss Lipscomb's flowers, growing so trimly on either side of the neat walk leading up to the little yellow house, half covered with rose-vines and honeysuckles. Late roses, violets, narcissuses, and chrysanthemums, in every variety of color and size, sent fragrant breaths out on the still, sweet air. He went up the steps and rapped at the door, then turned to look again while he awaited an answer to the summons. Bright, frost-painted leaves from the overhanging trees floated down to his feet, and golden bars of sunlight pierced the lattice. Mrs. Lipscomb opened the door herself.

"Good-afternoon, madam. Is Miss Lipscomb at home?"

"No, sir; she is not at home," answered the lady, while her eyes questioned his purpose in calling for her daughter.

"I am sorry. I have a package for her which I should like to have the pleasure of delivering in person," returned Bob, while he felt himself blushing.

"She is out, just now, giving a music lesson; but it is almost time for her to come home. Would you like to come in and wait?" and she stepped back, giving him entrance.

"If you please," he said, taking the chair offered. "Thanks! I presume this is Mrs. Lipscomb? Dean is my name. I am so unfortunate as to be the cause of your daughter's loss of a valuable piece of music a few days since. I hope she will permit me to replace it," he said, tapping his knee with the roll in his hand.

"Yes. Mary told me about it. She was very much amused at the circumstance."

"I am grateful that she is so kind as to view my awkwardness with so much leniency."

"Oh, it was purely an accident; not worth mentioning. You have taken charge of the boys' school here, I believe?"

"Yes, madam. I have been installed now some days."

"We 've a pretty rough set of boys here, sir. I hope you will succeed in managing them better than the last teacher did."

Mrs. Lipscomb lived a lonely life. There were only herself and Mary in family, and they had little means except their cottage home and the daughter's income from her music class, which, of course, kept her much occupied. The opportunity of making so promising acquaintance as the young school-master, whose praise she already heard on every tongue, was not to be neglected, simply because Mary was absent. She was a pleasant woman, with a sweet, kind face, and brown hair, turning gray; but Bob could not prevent taking notice of an uncommonly large wen, which disfigured the left cheek just below her eyes. Little did he realize now how important a factor this same deformity should become to him.

"Judging from my one week's experience I do not think the boys here ruder than the generality of their kind," said he, in answer to her remark; "they have been quite civil to me."

"Perhaps they found out from the first that they had to be. Boys only need a *man* to manage them."

"As scions of the republic they refuse to succumb to any but full-grown specimens of their kind."

"I suppose so; and then with bad grace."

"I don't blame them. I was a boy myself not long since.

Submission is not pleasant in any case, and only becomes tolerable when inevitable, through the mastery of a stronger will, or when robbed of its bitterness by the sweet deception of being voluntary; whenever practicable I shall try the latter plan, beguile them into thinking my will is their own, and thus make it pleasanter for all parties."

"Boys are hard to fool. I think they see into people's motives quicker than older folks."

"You think nature has endowed them with intuition, as a protection while strength is developing? Perhaps so."

"I should n't wonder if *you* managed them, though. As I said, boys will respect a *man*," and Mrs. Lipscomb glanced approvingly at Bob's well-made person.

"Was your last teacher a lady?" he asked, ignoring the compliment her look implied.

"Oh, no; he was only *not* a man; a little fellow, not so tall as I, with a big head and long black hair, which he wore in curls down his neck. He was very particular about having the 'Professor' put before his name, and I believe he was half crazy on the subject of phrenology. He wanted to control and train the boys according to their mental development, of which he judged by feeling their heads."

"And did the boys object to being bumped?" asked Bob.

"Yes," continued the widow; "and it was n't long before they had, most of them, more bumps than they were entitled to; for all they did was to play and fight, and when the parents complained the Professor said that it could not be helped; let me see if I can remember his words about it—oh, yes! 'Combativeness was very strongly developed in the boys of Milam County, owing to the pure air they breathed, the lime in the water they drank, which fed the bone and sinew, the absence of phosphoretic elements in their food (being distant

from the sea and its finny spoils), which would have corrected the undue influence by diverting the nervous fluid into brain fibre, added to the impalpable effect of the spirit of freedom which pervades the West,' and I don't know how much more of the same sort of stuff; he was writing a book on the subject when the trustees turned him off."

"What he lacked in the physical make-up of manhood he atoned for in philosophy. I am afraid they have lost in the exchange," said Bob, with a hearty laugh, which was contagious. It was a merry couple for newly-made acquaintance, upon which the outer door now opened, admitting the young lady just called for, who seemed somewhat surprised to find her mother on such sociable terms with a stranger. But when she recognized him she stepped forward and offered her hand as her mother introduced him, and happy Bob was favored with another of those marvellous gleams of prisoned sunshine, the quintessence of merriment and good-will.

When the door opened the little room had been flooded with the afternoon sunlight, and in the golden sheen Mary had entered. Strange that ever after Bob thought of her, in absence, as she looked now, standing in the yellow glow. The impression of the previous meeting in the blustering wind was forever banished. While they are passing mutual compliments, giving and disclaiming apologies, we will look at her, for I am anxious you should know exactly how she looks, and you would pardon me for being tediously explicit if I could show you her perfectly. Large, erect, full-chested, with every rounded muscle moulded in most perfect symmetry, she was certainly a handsome young woman. Perhaps, if you measured her features by the strictest criterion of feminine beauty, you would not pronounce her faultless; but noble-looking and winsome was she without a doubt. From a broad, white fore-

head swept waves of luxuriant brown hair, so rich, so abundant, you could hardly believe it all grew on the shapely head around which it lay coiled like a queen's coronet. Well-arched brows, darker than the hair; the eyes are wondrously deep, clear, and dark, heavily fringed with long lashes, and full of friendship and candor when they rest full on yours, as if to permit you "to look upon her naked heart and love her." The rather large nose is clear-cut and regular, indicating force of character. Wide, sensitive red lips, ever ready to smile, disclosing perfect rows of pearly teeth. If the upper part of her face is a trifle too strong the fault is fully atoned for by the sweet, womanly double-chin, with a cunning dimple, companion to one in the left cheek, which keeps fruitless guard over the flitting color. Add to these a complexion of rare purity, for the Texas climate, and you have a picture of our heroine. After you have looked as long as propriety will allow, you will still be at a loss to understand why you cannot give her fair looks the credit of the indescribable charm which pervades her presence; then you may happen to stumble on the truth—that it is the pure, womanly heart, shining through the sweet face, that attracts you.

Bob Dean could never remember what he said that golden afternoon, nor what she answered. Neither did he try to analyze the spell that possessed him, which he was loath to break when the slanting sun rays warned him of a waiting supper, perhaps an irate hostess. He did not ask himself whither had vanished the home-sickness and dreariness of the past days, nor whence had come the new life which swelled his heart as he strode down the sidewalk with firmly planted footsteps, as though he were walking into some pleasant situation. There was a look of resolve about the pleasant mouth, and a light in the clear gray eyes that even the thoughts of his darling mother had never kindled before.

The day was just such a still, soft one as November delights to paint on the echo edge of Indian summer, a yellow haze in the air and a smell of frost-touched leaves, overhead the dazzling blue of Southern sky, across the western margin of which brilliant clouds are piling. Behind these the sun is now setting, ashamed of his false promises of fair weather.

CHAPTER VI.

"OUR OTHER BOARDER."

MR. BROWN'S house stood out in bold contrast to the dinginess of its neighbors. It was a new two-story frame, pretentious with white paint and green blinds. Fences new, shrubbery new, everything new around it but the stately Spanish oaks in the yard and the people who lived inside.

Mr. Brown had moved to Texas in '34, had fought through the wars of the republic, and afterward married a pretty woman much younger than himself, who was of later immigration from Missouri. He boasted that he had followed every trade at which a man could get an honest living *out of doors*, and had lived in every county in Texas that was fit for a white man to stop in; had moved on an average of every three years, until five years back, when he had bought a fine tract of bottom land on Little River, and gone into the sawmill business. In clearing he found a fine old black walnut tree, dead long enough to be in prime seasoning. He cut and sawed it into lumber, and got a clever workman "from the States" to make his wife a set of furniture from it. Among the other pieces was a huge wardrobe, which exactly

suited her, and from which she vowed never would she part. It was too big for one wagon load, and could not be knocked down, so he had concluded to build a house around it and stay at one place. Ask him his opinion of Texas and he would give it about thus:

"Been in Texas a long time. Seed a heap of kentry; 'bout all that's worth seein'. Fought with Houston; was with Moore at Gonzales; helped fire off the cannon at Castanado's men. Old vet. now. Kentry's 'bout all alike. Some folks like prairie best; plenty of it for 'em. If you want timber land, plenty of that, too, *and* as good as *any* in the world. Times are not like they used to be, though. Money skeerce now. Seed the time I had a stockin'-leg full of gold in my box under the bed, an' nobody thought anything extra of it. Too many people comin' here to make their fortunes easy. Used ter could make money 'thout work; but, by jingo! you can't do it now. Things air as high now as when we hauled 'em from Houston in an ox-wagin. Railroads make all the money now, 'taint no savin' to other folks; but I've got nothin' agin railroads, they hope me on considerable."

Mr. Brown's mill was some twelve miles distant on the river, but he preferred to have his family live in town for "church and school privileges," though Jennie was his only child, and she had no further use for schools unless the teacher were eligible for a beau, and church privilege culminated in about the same thing for her.

The International Railroad had, a few years back, run into the section, and established a station near Mr. Brown's mill, thus bringing into active demand the lumber there produced. This gale of fortune he had met with spread canvas, and the combined circumstances brought about a state of finances that he and his were not slow to enjoy. He was rarely at

home himself except on Sunday; so it was that Bob Dean had not yet made the acquaintance of his host; but to-night, when he came in to tea, he found Mr. Brown already seated at the table, enjoying to the fullest the hot coffee and muffins.

"Come in, Mr. Dean," said Mrs. Brown; "you are late. I make you acquainted with Mr. Brown."

"Glad to know you, sir," said Mr. Brown, only half-way rising from the table as he extended to Bob a horny hand, bruised and roughened by toil, while his keen eyes shot a glance first at him then back to the good "creature comforts" displayed on the board.

"Jest got in myself," he continued, with his mouth full of muffin; "rode hard. Knowed if I was behindhand supper would be over. Betty never waits for nobody—jest right, too; but I do hate to set down to a warmed-over bite by myself. I hain't been home before for three weeks. Got so I wanted to see Bets and Jinse right bad. Got some machinery out o' fix, so I could n't grind to-morrow nohow; so I left Jenkins, my foreman, to look after things, and I got on Button and come off. Help you to sausages?—wife, there 's lots of pepper in 'em."

During this harangue, Bob has been able to listen and at the same time take several satisfactory glances at Jennie, who has returned, and is sitting, rosy and demure, opposite him.

"A fine evening, Mr. Brown," said Bob, as soon as he had opportunity, the person addressed having stopped talking a moment to watch, with interest too deep for words, his second cup of black coffee, into which Jennie was deliberately dropping little lumps of sugar,—deliberately, because both men were watching her, and her little brown hand is uncommonly pretty and plump.

"That 's enough, Jinse; I don't want *all* the sugar. I

don't know so well about the weather—pretty enough while it lasts—blue norther before morning—wish it may—want to kill my hogs—what *you* say, Bets?"

"It will suit me very well if it turns cold. Did you get me the sage in Rockdale? that they've got here is nothing but trash."

"Sage! declare I clean forgot what it was you wanted; knowed there was something, too; thought it was onions—Jinse is always wantin' onions—chip off of the old block—they're out there in a poke. Be bound Widow Lipscomb's got sage to spare; she always has all such in her garden."

Bob raised his eyes inquisitively to meet Jennie's as her father alluded to her peculiar taste. Her high color did not deepen, but the full lower lip pushed out, and the black eyes snapped defiance at his presumption. Just then the mention of Mrs. Lipscomb's name, for some unaccountable reason, brought a red flush to Bob's forehead. Now Miss Jennie knew not that the widow's name was in any way familiar to him, so she naturally set down his confusion to the credit of her own big eyes, and forthwith brightened into vivacity.

"Papa, did you see or hear anything of Dr. Conway in Rockdale yesterday?" Her eyes fell shyly as she asked the question; but whether the coyness were real or feigned, Bob could not, for the life of him, tell.

"Dr. Conway! No! What's he doing in Rockdale? Have you and him fell out? Ke! ke! ke!"

"He expected to reach there on his way home from Galveston on Thursday, but said he would stay over till to-day and bring Dr. Norman with him, to assist in removing that wen from Mrs. Lipscomb's face. He ought to have arrived before now, but he has not come yet—" (a little caught breath, with her eyes yet on her plate.)

"Humph! 'Spose you 're gettin' oneasy, hey? No; I hain't seed him. Mr. Dean, you see Dr. Conway is our other boarder, only he has been here nearly six months now, and we begin to feel like he was one of the individual family."

He winked at Jennie as well as was possible for very little eyes to wink above tight red cheeks distended with muffins and smiles. Jennie saw his joke, even if she were looking at her plate.

"Do you extend the same favor to all your boarders? If so, I consider myself fortunate indeed—an unlooked for *prospect.*"

Bob's voice was so earnest and steady that Jennie could not resist the temptation to look up and discover if he were as serious and respectful as his tone indicated. Her glance was just in time to get the full benefit of the fun in his dark eyes. It was irresistible. The saucy lips revealed a gleam of pearl, and her eyes answered his.

"It depends on how friendly you 've a mind to be, I suppose," said Mr. Brown, in answer to Bob, as he rose from the table, and, proceeding to fill his pipe from a pouch of tobacco, he stood in the open door and puffed with a power which might rival his own mill-engine, while he scanned the now darkening heavens for the signs of favorable hog-killing weather.

Bob had not finished his supper, and Jennie sat still for company, toying with her teacup and eating hot pickle.

"Did you have a pleasant visit, Miss Brown?" asked Bob, by way of opening conversation.

"Call me Jennie, please. I hate Miss Brown. I mean to change my name one of these days before long." Her eyes, cast up to the ceiling, are full of tears because the pickle is too hot. "Yes, I had a *splendid* time. Amanda Gregg and

I rode every day horseback, and we had two sociables. I had such a nice beau! Ooph!" (This last on account of the pickle, and not the beau.) "And you?"

"I have been a little lonely myself, but I feel better to-night," and Bob's thought is of a certain fair vision, of golden sunshine and wondrous, winsome eyes.

"Yes?" answered Jennie, flattered, not knowing anything of the vision. "I am glad to hear it. I hope you won't be lonely here. Sometimes *I* get sad, though."

A deep sigh and pensive eyes. Bob finishes his coffee, and rising, waits a moment before leaving the room. Jennie is absorbed in thought. He laughs at her coyness before he asks,

"Will you repeat your invitation of the other evening? I have no letters to write to-night, and perhaps we might assist each other to keep off loneliness."

"Oh, excuse me! certainly;" and she leads the way, calling back, "Papa, you may come in, too, *with* your pipe, as I see it is a new one."

In the parlor there is a bright fire burning, needlessly; for they open the windows to let in the balmy evening air. When Bob was seated on one side of the fireplace, Jennie was his *vis-a-vis;* as the post oak-wood flamed and glowed, the red light played about the piquant outlines of her selfish little face, lending it warmth and feeling. She had crouched on a low ottoman in the corner, with one trim little foot planted in full view, her left elbow resting on her knee, the hand half hidden in the clustering curls. The collar of her dark dress lay back, exposing the smooth, brown neck; the simple fluted ruffle and deep red tie might have looked ordinary on some other woman, but everything Jennie Brown wore seemed to suit her especially. Her face was half averted, and her whole attitude pensive—she might have been think-

ing, but perhaps was only acting a part; for she knew Bob was watching her, though he had withdrawn into the shadow of the chimney, pleading weak eyes. Mr. Brown did the talking.

"Have n't been long in Texas, have you, Mr. Dean?"

"About twenty-six years," answered Bob, smiling.

"That long? Why you don't 'pear to be that old, and you 've not the look of an old Texian."

"I was born in the city of Austin twenty-six years ago; my parents came to the State in '49."

"That so? well, I would n't ha' thought it. Now there 's Dr. Conway looks more the Texian than you do, and he 's only been out from Virginia 'bout a year—one of the double-F.V 's too, *I* guess; but then you see the Doctor 's allus stirrin' around, and has got the 'Texas tan.' *He 's* a lucky fellow—come here last June, and now he has the best of the practice in the place—fust-rate doctor, too, he is—when a man 's sick he gives him medicine right along, and cures him up instanter, 'stead of preachin' round about bathing and dieting and cistern water and such stuff. The girls here all like him, too—b'lieve on my soul he could take his pick of ary girl in town right now, hey, Jinse?" and Mr. Brown planted a hand on each knee of his brown jeans pants, bent his compact little body forward, and emitted a series of almost inaudible "ki, ki, ki's," which, with the tightening of his red, weather-beaten cheeks, and the disappearance of his eyes under the shaggy, gray brows, did him service as laughter.

As I said, Bob was watching Jennie—he could n't have helped it had he tried—and had seen her color gradually rising and deepening, until, under her father's last thrust, it leaped to the very edge of her hair and tips of her pretty ears; though her head tossed defiantly, and her pouting lips

looked disdainful enough, there was a confession of guilt in the downcast eyes and quivering chin.

"Ah," thought Bob, "is that the way the truth lies? I've found out a nice little secret, perhaps; very well, Miss Jennie," and he takes comfort for himself in another view of the aforementioned vision.

'T is said, if you "speak of an angel you will hear the flutter of its wings;" perhaps thoughts are as potent; for Mrs. Brown, coming in just now from the dining-room with candles, ushered in Mrs. Lipscomb and Mary, who had entered at the side-gate, near the kitchen. Jennie sprang forward to welcome the visitors, gladly, for she was fond of both ladies; as she kissed Mary, she scanned her toilet critically—she always took notice how other women were dressed; if it were to judge of its becomingness, she had reason to be satisfied, be she ever so fastidious. Mary's simple black dress was long and close-fitting, displaying to advantage her superb form, without ornament, save soft lace about her white throat and shapely wrists, and a cluster of snowy chrysanthemums in the waving hair. Jennie looked from her to Bob, and was about to introduce them, when Mary spoke his name and smiled pleasantly. Bob, forgetting ceremony, stepped forward and offered his hand. I am afraid the grasp was warmer than he knew, for her soft eyes looked a trifle surprised, and the tea-rose tint on her cheeks deepened. Jennie's eyes flashed interrogation points from one to the other, but Bob only said, dryly,

"I am happy in having met Miss Lipscomb," his deep voice quiet and non-committal; but about his mouth and eyes there was something so suggestive of fun, that Mary came near losing her gravity again. Jennie was all curiosity, but Mary did not explain, and she could not press the question of how and when they had met.

"You see, Mr. Dean," said Mrs. Lipscomb, "we came to return your call quite soon."

Jennie opened her eyes wider, arched her brow, and nodded her head knowingly at Bob, who returned the salutation, but answered Mrs. Lipscomb only in his next words.

"I am obliged, but I fear I was not the attraction to-night."

"You ought to be glad to take the credit; but, honestly, there was another. We came to see if Dr. Conway had returned."

Mr. Brown took the task of responding upon himself.

"We have heard nothing from him. But, Miss Mary, you need not be uneasy—what did I tell you, while ago, Mr. Dean? don't you see it 's true? I forgot to tell you all there was a show in Rockdale to-night; of course he stayed to see it; I 've heard him say he always went to see the animals. Ki! ki! ki!"

"So he does n't confine his interest to lovely and loving specimens of his own kind?" said Bob to Jennie, who had taken a seat near him. She laughed, but made no answer, which Bob did not notice, for he was looking at Mary, who had flushed painfully under Mr. Brown's jest, and raised her slender hand to hide her cheeks, in a nervous way.

"I felt so anxious about that operation, I made Mary come with me to see about it," said Mrs. Lipscomb, touching with her forefinger the disfigured cheek.

"I don't see how you can entertain the idea of having it performed. As long as it did not hurt, I 'd let it alone."

"Oh! don't say so, Mrs. Brown," exclaimed Mary; "I 've had so much difficulty in persuading mother to have it taken off. I can hardly feel like it is mother with *that* on her face." The last in a low, tender tone, with a tremor in the sweet voice.

"I agree with you, Miss Lipscomb," said Bob, quickly, "if the trouble is simply a wen, there can be little or no danger in having it removed."

"By-the-by, I believe you are something of a doctor yourself, ain't you, Mr. Dean?" queried Mr. Brown.

"Not yet, sir. I have chosen surgery as a profession, and have had a little practical experience in the hospitals while attending lectures; but I do not yet append the M. D. to my name."

"And do you think there would be no danger?" asked Mary, appealingly; "I want it done, *so much.*"

"None whatever. If the operator were skilful, I should not debate the question a moment. I hold that one has no right to suffer a deformity like that to remain a blot on his comeliness. Miss Jennie, don't you think it is everybody's duty to look his best, out of charity to his neighbor?"

I am afraid his thoughts were not of Jennie Brown's best looks, though his smile was for her, and her conscious blush showed she appropriated to herself any complimentary allusion his remark might contain. She let her eyes fall as she answered innocently: "I always look as nice as I can."

"I believe you."

"You may think as you please about it," said Mrs. Lipscomb, "but the looks are a small matter to me. Mary wants the wen cut off, and I promised her I would have it done, and now I want it over with. I wish Dr. Conway would come home and attend to his business." She looked as little concerned as her words indicated.

"I believe that is he now," exclaimed Jennie, as the hall door opened and there followed the sound of putting down packages and the jingle of a spur thrown on the floor. Her impulse was to go forward to receive him, but second thought waited for her mother to do so.

He came in leisurely, greeting the assembled party with grace, and acknowledged the introduction to Bob in so hearty a manner as to win a kindly feeling from that person at once. When he recognized Mary Lipscomb, he made a long stride to her, stood close, and took her hand, holding it a thought too long. And she, beautiful woman, so self-possessed and well poised, was still self-possessed, but the full eyes went up to his with shy gladness, then straightway fell under the white lids, while the dimples, in cheek and chin, hid among the blushes in a way more befitting a school-girl than the stately woman whom Bob Dean was watching with intense interest—watching too closely this time for his own comfort, for he saw the silent play of feeling and read it aright, while his heart sank in his bosom, down, down, down. His were not the only eyes on the alert. Jennie's truant heart thumped against her snug-fitting basque, and a chill ran down to the ends of her tiny toes.

The Doctor now crossed over the room to greet her, shook hands cordially, and beamed brilliant smiles, but his eyes scarcely met hers, and his words were embarrassed. Having finished his greetings, he seated himself by Mary Lipscomb.

Dr. Duval Conway was just such a man as doubtless we have all known in the course of our lives. Not that he was commonplace, yet such characters as his are common enough. You will realize what I mean as you get acquainted with him. To look at, he was an agreeable specimen of the *genus homo*. Quite above average height, with broad, grand shoulders, massive head, whose tawny hair was close cut and curling, habitually bent forward as if to plead forgiveness for being so obtrusively handsome. His forehead was very white where the hat protected it, but the rest of his face was richly bronzed with "Texas tan." Deep eyes, blue and thrilling, and a lux-

uriant brown beard, sweeping down over his chest, finished a personnel which, Agamemnon like, "cast in the mould of Titans," was well able to move the heart of a woman; and that Mary Lipscomb's heart was stirred, a close observer could readily perceive, though her quiet dignity had asserted itself again. The Doctor had seated himself and her on a *tête-à-tête* in the corner opposite Jennie and Bob, and rather behind the others. Their words were commonplace enough, but his eyes spoke volumes of ardent longings, and she could not meet them calmly. The very fact that the white lids covered her sweet eyes, which were wont to look so candidly on a speaker, told bitter truths to Jennie Brown, who keenly watched them, while she pretended to take interest in the round talk of the room—told more than the truth, for, though commonplace, those words were low toned, and Jennie believed they were love words. With burning eyes and white face she drew her chair still nearer to Bob Dean, and talked with a dignity that was new to her. Coquetry was banished for the time, and she led the conversation into channels which he had deemed beyond her depth, evincing a mental culture for which he had not given her credit. Bob believed he understood the feelings which were prompting her, and while his respect was deepened, down in his heart there grew up for her a great pity—a pity born of sympathy. She shot an occasional glance over at the couple in the corner.

The Doctor was now showing Mary a catalogue of Centennial illustrations which he had brought home with him; the book lying in her lap, he sat quite near her, and his hand rested on the leaves, while his words were inaudible to any but his listener, and her looks were fair, beyond the power of words to tell.

Jennie's nature begins to assert itself, and her tactics to

change. She talks on, but the topics are of lighter matter, and her sparkling coyness comes back. Bob understands her again, and meets her advances with as much semblance of flirtation as their limited acquaintance makes decorous. He has a decided advantage over the other players in this little drama, for he is partially in the dark, and can see the lines of their faces while his own features are but imperfectly revealed. He is becoming more and more interested. I am afraid his part is hardly fair, but the situation is fast assuming the aspect of love and war, where fairness is out of the question.

Directly Mary glanced over at them, and a gleam of friendly fun lit her face while she spoke to her companion. His eyes followed hers, and Bob Dean thought he detected a shade of something uncomfortable in their expression. It soon passed away, but left him preoccupied, and from that time his *tête-à-tête* flagged. Note here a phase of Dr. Conway's character—nor is it uncommon. Whenever he began to suspect he could not have a thing he coveted, he immediately found himself unable to be happy without it; willing to leave that already attained, he would throw his whole energy in quest of the seemingly unattainable. In general, the difficulty soon yielded; for few things in this life will long withstand such an onset—those kind of things I mean that Duval Conway would desire or seek—things pertaining to his personal ease, the goodwill of men, and the heart of woman. Seeing Jennie Brown intensely interested in Mr. Dean, he suddenly found that he wanted her himself. Rising, he crossed over to her and said,

"Come now, Miss Jennie, we have had no music to-night."

"Oh, Dr. Conway, get Miss Mary to play now. I don't like to play where she is—I don't do it well enough;" her

shrug and frown plainly indicating that she did not wish to be interrupted.

"After awhile, I will; but I want *you* now," said he, laying stress on the pronoun; and he opened the piano, lit the candles, brought a book of music, then stood and waited in a manner that admitted no denial. Still Jennie lingered, waiting to finish what she was saying to Bob. She so evidently wished him to accompany her to the instrument, that he took his stand on her left, while the Doctor was on the right.

"What shall I play, Dr. Conway?" she asked indifferently, toying with the keys; then, before he could answer, turned to Bob. "Mr. Dean, are *you* fond of music?"

"Indeed I am, Miss Jennie. There is but one thing in the world I love better."

"Pray, who is that?" Jennie's eyes are full of wonder.

"I think that is hardly a fair question, lady." Bob laughed, for he knew they would not guess he was talking about his precious mother.

"Oh!" and her black lashes swept burning cheeks; the cunning child felt Dr. Conway's eyes upon her, and looked up to catch the significant glance which he passed to Mary, who had joined the group at the instrument. He had arranged on the rack "In the Twilight Glade," a tender duet, which they had often sung together, each throwing in much counterfeit pathos, after the manner of folks who are making believe love. But this evening she pushed it away.

"Oh, no; not that. I don't feel the least bit sentimental to-night. Let 's have something we can all sing. Miss Mary will help. Do you sing, Mr. Dean?"

"Sometimes."

"Yes? I 'm so glad. Will you take the tenor? Oh, that is splendid. Here is a lovely quartette, Doctor and I have

practised some. Miss Mary, you know it—'To Shady Woodlands Stealing.' Just a *little* difficult."

Bob had taken up the notes to examine, and when he replaced them, Jennie played through the prelude; then wheeling round to Mary, who stood behind her, said:

"Miss Mary, won't you please play this accompaniment. I never can get the time right when I sing alto—and I've got the fidgets anyway, to-night." Rising, she pressed Mary into her place, giving the Doctor a triumphant glance as she did so. Compared with poor, flushed Jennie, her friend looked refreshingly cool and self-possessed; as her slender fingers touched the keys, she turned to Bob.

"Are you familiar with the music, Mr. Dean?"

"I am not, Miss Lipscomb. I believe I have not seen it before. But if you will run over the melody once, and give me the key-note, perhaps I can sing it."

A twinkle in her eyes gave him the clew to her thoughts, and he added, "But it is I who am addicted to running over melodies and melodists."

Their mingled laughter brought upon them hasty questions. No use; Mary turned assiduously to music, only the restless dimples displaying any hint of mirth. Soon all thought was lost in the beauty of the song. Mary's voice was a pure soprano, with untried power in the upper notes; Jennie's a clear contralto; the Doctor's bass rich and full—not quite correct as to time, but fair for an amateur. But when Bob Dean's tenor struck in, so flute-like and so perfect was it, the others had liked to have stopped to listen. Bob had cultivated his voice thoroughly. In their poverty-stinted lives, he and his mother had made music one of their costless luxuries. Her vocation as a music-teacher of marked genius, gave her many friends among the guild, and Bob had the advantage of

the best masters; profiting thereby, he had not many superiors, outside the professionals, in his much-loved art. The quartette was followed by other selections, in which each participated, singly or in concert, until Mrs. Lipscomb interrupted them.

"That is delightful;—but we must go home now, Baby." She often gave to her beautiful woman-child this pet name; it might have sounded silly but for the sweet intonation the mother-love blended with its syllables. Turning to the Doctor she added, "When will you be ready for that operation?"

"I can scarcely tell, madam. I expected to bring Dr. Norman over with me, but he could not leave a case he had on hand. I will see to-morrow if Dr. Winthrope can come and assist me."

"Mr. Dean said while ago that he'd had some experience in the business. Could n't he help in the job?" queried Mr. Brown.

"I bow to my fellow-craftsman and the profession," said Dr. Conway, gracefully extending his hand, over which he inclined low his superb head.

"Only in its incipiency," laughingly returned the craftsman.

"But really, Mr. Dean, I should be glad to secure your services. Any one with good nerve and only a slight experience could render me all the assistance I require."

"Thanks. I am flattered by your request, and am at your service."

"You place me under obligations," returned the Doctor.

"If you two are done with your oriental compliments, we will bid you good-night," said Mary.

"Just a moment more, if you please, Miss Mary. What time will suit you, Mr. Dean, in the morning? but you are at school? no? to-morrow *is* Saturday, that's a fact—*we*

don't have Saturdays in *our* profession, you know. Well, let 's say ten o'clock in the morning."

His words were light and careless, but there was solicitude in the glance that scanned the faces of Mrs. Lipscomb and her daughter; the former, with raised eyebrows and forefinger on lip, was calculating whether she could have her sponge set for the day's baking by that time. But, though Mary tried to appear calm and cheerful, her sweet lips were trembling and her eyes were shaded with solicitude. She now threw over her dark hair some fleecy covering, as an initiatory step of departure. Dr. Conway came to her side, saying, "I will see you home;" and, without waiting for her permission or the cover of the outer darkness, took her hand, and placing it on his left arm offered the other to her mother, and carried them out, his manner leaving no doubt in Bob's mind that he had asserted only what he considered to be his right. Mr. and Mrs. Brown had preceded their guests to the hall door, and did not return to the parlor. Bob looked at Jennie. She was standing on the rug, her little hands tightly locked over her breast, the childish lips hard compressed, and a gleam of something near akin to ferocity in her big, dusky eyes. Her wounded heart had mastered her cunning for once, and she did not even try to conceal her pain from Bob, who, seeing her about to close the piano, came to her assistance. While she put away the candles and straightened the cover over the piano she did not speak nor look at him; but he knew she was only afraid to trust her voice except to say "good-night," as she went up the stairs to her own room. This was adjoining Bob's; and when he went up soon afterwards all was silent, and there came no gleam of light through the keyhole of the locked door between them.

He felt restless and miserable, so he wrote a letter to his

mother, his unfailing comforter. Just as it was finished Dr. Conway came home and up-stairs to his room, opposite Bob's. As he was about to enter it he changed his mind, and tapped at Bob's door.

"Come in!"

"Thanks! No; I will not sit down," he said, as Bob handed him his own easy-chair. "I was up late last night in Rockdale. Went to hear Dr. Young on temperance. Ever hear him? No? Well, I determined I would not be made to laugh at his nonsense, but, 'pon my life, I could n't help it. He talks solid sense, and so well, he gains your attention and good-will, and then he throws in the fun before you have time to get back on your dignity, and you find yourself grinning like the rest of the simpletons. Well, I just dropped in to say I 've made all necessary arrangements for that operation in the morning."

"Judging from appearance you will have a cool subject. She does not seem to allow her nerves to have any part in the business."

"Has n't got any, sir; you 're right, she is pluck to the backbone."

"I should judge her to be a brave, strong woman," said Bob, quietly.

"With a daughter in every sense worthy of her parent," added the Doctor, with an embarrassed laugh and a caressing stroke to his fine beard. "Really, Mr. Dean, I am glad you are so kind as to assist me in that little job to-morrow. Not that I shall positively need any help, you know; but when one 's cutting about the face, you never know when you may sever a little artery which might, at least, prove troublesome, and then it would be handy to have a person about who knows a thing or two without being told."

He had been standing on the rug, watch in hand, while he talked. Now he shut it with a snap, and pushing his white hand through his tawny curls, he took his huge person out of the door, saying: "You'll find some extra blankets in this cedar chest in the hall; you will need them before morning. Good-night!"

When the door closed on him all was very still for a few moments, then Bob could hear a choked sobbing from the next room.

"Poor, little thing, she has more heart than she cares to show. I don't quite understand matters yet; but *she* loves *him*, and he—" Bob stopped in the act of drawing off his last boot—softly, lest he startle his little neighbor—and with the heel still in his hand, mused a moment. Then his cleft chin made itself a little broader, and he finished undressing and went to bed.

CHAPTER VII.

A GLEAM OF GOLD.

THREE o'clock, Saturday afternoon. The predicted Norther had been forthcoming, and when Bob Dean awoke that morning, he found the household in an unusual stir, preparing for the hog-killing Mr. Brown had planned. During the day the family had been all so engaged that he had seen little of them.

From his window now he could see eight large carcasses hanging, white and cold, on a bar nailed between the trunks of two neighboring post oaks. Around a fire in the yard

near by, the family were still at work. Aunt Cindy, the cook, with her two sable daughters, Mat and Lizzie, were busy near the fire. Mr. Brown and two negro men were still slaughtering and cleaning. Mrs. Brown seemed to be in all the work at times, and occasionally Jennie would trip out of the kitchen with a great pan in her arms. A short skirt and stout little calf shoes exhibited the pretty, quick feet. A buff sun-bonnet, into which the curls were tucked, hid her face, but there was no lagging in her steps, no drooping look about her. Bob, seeing her from his window, thought of the sobbing in the night and admired her spirit.

The autumn had been unusually mild, and many of the leaves were still clinging to the trees, to be now torn away and whirled recklessly by the wind. Two, upon one stem, had lodged on the sill of the window, and were struggling there to free themselves from the detaining shutter, that they might go on in their wild revel. Bob raised the sash and released them. Had he been sentimental, he doubtless would have taken them in, and perhaps drawn some analogy between them and his own lonely, yet entangled condition. As it was, he simply let them fly, and put down the sash before the room should get cold.

Bob Dean had no nonsense about him this afternoon. The surgical operation, projected for the forenoon had been performed, not altogether as well, either, as he or the Doctor could have wished. Dr. Conway was nervous, and as he had indeed seemed to apprehend, the lancet had slipped a trifle and severed a little artery near the eye, which at first bled profusely, but was soon checked.

Bob saw Mary's set lips, white face, and intense eyes, and fearing she would faint, took her two hands in his and led her to a seat. But the hands, though cold, were very firm, and when

the Doctor could leave her mother he went to her, and speaking some low words of comfort, received for an answer such a look of trust as left poor Bob out of all consideration.

As soon as Mrs. Lipscomb was comfortable, he excused himself and came home, leaving the Doctor to supply such panaceas as he had at command in case of need, for patient or her fair child.

As he walked home alone, he met facts face to face, as well as the keen November norther. "I love her. I know it now, but it is no use. Strange, strange, that it should come to me now, and thus. I have often looked ahead to the time I should fall in love, but I never expected this sort of a knock-down. There is no hope for me; she loves that fellow with every atom of her heart; and Jennie too, poor little Jennie. Strange that some men can have all the luck in love, while their neighbors get only blanks."

He was treading the same path he had walked on the last afternoon; the same trees, fences, and houses around, the same sky overhead, but the coloring was gone. The sheen of the golden sun was wanting without, and the gilding of a new-born hope within his soul. There was only the gray, the neutral tint of ordinary life. I said "only," but that is sombre enough to eyes that have just been shut out from a glorious illumination. The firm steps lagged a little, and his hand played about the strong lines of mouth and chin, then plunged deep into the gray overcoat pocket, while with uplifted head he finished his soliloquy.

"But it is no use; and I am not the lad to sit down and bemoan a broken heart. I've too much to do in this world before I am ready for the next."

He found his room cold and cheerless, too, the usually genial fire represented only by dying embers and drifts of

ashes on the hearth. But his wood-box was well supplied, and he was used to waiting on himself. While cutting kindling from a pine board with his pocket-knife, the hint of a thought crept up that the fire-place was a fair picture of his love-life. He put the live coals together, laid on his kindling (and his hint of a thought with it), piled up the wood, and fanned lustily with his broad hat. Rewarded by a cheerful flame, he swept the hearth clean of gray ashes, and nodding his head several times finished the argument.

"Yes, sir; that's the way to do it! and we'll see about the other matter, too." Then he took out of his trunk some blank books, which he proceeded to check out in form suitable for school-, roll-, and class-books. From this work he was called to dinner.

Jennie did not make her appearance at table, and when Bob asked after her welfare Mrs. Brown said, laughing,

"Jennie took an awful notion to be useful to-day—she's been pottering around in the lard and sausage-meat, and says she ain't fit to be seen for grease."

"I should think not," said Bob, dryly.

"I don't know what's her notion—she never did love to work, and goodness knows she don't need to if she's not a mind to—something's come over her."

Bob believed she was only avoiding him until he should forget last night. He had not seen her all day except at a distance, as breakfast was earlier than usual and she was not ready.

Dinner over, he went back to his work up-stairs. When he finished ruling his blank books he took up a medical treatise, and had just settled himself to hard work when his attention was attracted by the click of the gate-latch in the yard below. Looking out, he was surprised to see Jennie passing

through, equipped as for a walk. When she turned to fasten the gate she glanced up to his window, nodded saucily, and tripped away, looking, oh, so pretty, with her pink cheeks and sparkling eyes. She went straight to the Widow Lipscomb's. When inside the little front gate, she stopped to pluck a bunch of golden chrysanthemums which smiled up at her from the border, turned on her heel, poised as gracefully as a bird, and looked round the garden while she fastened the flowers at her throat and among her jetty curls. Cunning thing! she had seen Dr. Conway at the window. He bowed as she approached, and opened the door for her, and Mary met her so immediately that she suspected her to have been standing beside him. She was now in the same faultless sitting-room that Bob had admired so much the previous day. Mrs. Lipscomb, on a lounge at one side of the fire, looked pleasant and only a little pale. Mary was the ideal home-goddess in her dark print dress, narrow linen collar and cuffs, with that beautiful crown of gleaming hair.

"How are you this afternoon, Mrs. Lipscomb?" said Jennie, dropping on her knees at the side of the lounge.

"Pretty comfortable, I thank you. The operation was not as painful as I expected."

"Mother would n't take chloroform, or she need not have felt any pain," said Mary, as she untied and removed Jennie's coquettish little turban, receiving a nod by way of thanks—said nod tumbling a yellow flower out of her curls, now unconfined by hat. She took the blossom from the floor, and laid it affectionately against her cheek. The gold and crimson complimented each other, and the effect was charming; which fact was not lost on Dr. Conway, standing over on the rug.

"Not felt any pain then, perhaps," said Mrs. Lipscomb, in answer to Mary's remark, "but been very sick afterwards,

from nervous prostration. I think it best as it was; don't you, Doctor?"

Being addressed, he came forward, and handed Jennie a chair, at the same time taking the flower from her, as if to smell; but he did not return it as he answered,

"Well, madam, in your case, *perhaps*. But it is not many ladies could have borne the knife as you did. You only flinched perceptibly *once;* and that is what caused me to clip that artery, which *may* give us trouble yet, and make us all wish you had submitted to anæsthesia. If all of us mortals were made of your clay, then had Wells and Morton lived and discovered in vain. Miss Mary, are you in any way related to this modern Cornelia?"

"Your comparison is faulty, Doctor. The mother of the Gracchi sacrificed her children, and *mine* would bear all the pain in her own person," she answered, laughing.

"You have not answered my question. Are you, too, brave?"

Jennie could see the light in his fine eyes turned on her blushing friend, who looked at her mother as she answered,

"I do not know, sir. I have never been sick since I can remember, and I have never had much pain of any kind to try my fortitude."

She did not look, as she spoke, as if anything but sunshine had ever visited her happy life. Hers was a life of toil, but willing and well-appreciated toil. She had not yet found the curse in labor, for love went with it. The old people of the village praised her as a dutiful daughter, the "young" admired, and the little children loved her—all were kind, and gave her encouraging words as well as work.

Why was it that both her mother and Jennie glanced from her to the Doctor, as she made her gentle boast, and a shade

of care settled on the former's quiet face? The Doctor saw it, and changed color.

"Mrs. Lipscomb," said Jennie, "mamma sent her sympathy and excuses by me. She has been very busy all day, about the hog-killing, but she will come to see you to-morrow. There is Mat, now, with some spare-ribs and sausage for you. You need not go, Miss Mary; she can find her way to the kitchen, and give the pan to Laura."

"Laura is not here to-day. Her grandmother, old Mrs. Vinson, is much worse, and they sent for her to-day."

The Doctor suddenly raised his head, as with a start of surprise, but checked the impulse into a genteelly suppressed yawn.

"So you are without help!" exclaimed Jennie. "That is too bad, just now. I'll make Mat stay to help you, till Laura comes back; we don't need her." And the two girls went out, arm in arm.

Such a contrast! and both so charming, so interesting. Dr. Conway looked after them, then turned his eyes to the fire, and stroked his flowing beard. Mrs. Lipscomb lay still among her pillows, but the motherly eyes were very bright and very busy. When the girls returned to the parlor, he was standing on the rug, hat in hand, as if ready to take his departure, but he seemed to reconsider the step, and took a seat instead.

"Miss Mary, will you be out to church, to-morrow? I hope so; we can have some splendid music, now. Mr. Dean does sing *so* well;" and the rose changed to crimson, in Jennie's deceitful little face.

"I shall not leave mother, Jennie. You can play the organ as well as I."

"No, I can't let Mary go to-morrow," said Mrs. Lips-

comb, turning her eyes towards her child, the light of her life.

"Well; I can't play as well as you, but I suppose I can play *somehow;* but then"—and the taper fingers play meditatively about the ripe lips—"my voice is so weak on soprano, I can't lead—oh! I know what I shall do. Mr. Dean shall lead. He sings like an angel;" and she clapped her hands in childish delight.

"You seem to think he possesses many angelic perfections," said the Doctor, with a wry face.

"Well, I think he is *nice*," said Jennie, looking demurely on the floor; "he does tell the truth so *refreshingly*."

"What pleasant truths has he been unfolding to *you?* and is the accomplishment so rare among your friends, as to render it worthy of note when found in a stranger?" the Doctor asked.

A merry laugh from Mary, while Jennie retorted:

"Rare! What? Oh, truthfulness. Well, I don't know," —then, brightening—"but I don't *consider* Mr. Dean a stranger. We are *great* friends."

A gleam of pearl between the coral of her lips; and the pretty head was turned on one side, with such an action as a bird might envy.

"Oh!" responded Dr. Conway, with elevated brows. He did not know that Jennie had been gone all the week, and had seen scarcely more of Mr. Dean's attractions than he had, himself.

Now, Jennie took out a watch of Liliputian dimensions, saying,

"But I must go, now. Oh, Miss Mary, I have not shown you my lovely birthday present, papa brought me yesterday." She handed her the little watch, letting the golden chain slip

through her shapely fingers. It was a pretty little thing, but not more sparkling, figuratively speaking, than its diminutive owner. Was it the golden gleam of the jewel, or the proximity of her yellow flowers, that sent a flash of light over the Doctor's face, as he leaned forward to look, too? Jennie had it in her hand again, and he quietly took possession of hand and watch, too, holding open the pink palm, and pretending to give close scrutiny to the jewel. Jennie flushed and trembled a little, then drew her hand away coldly.

"Where did your papa get it? From some fairy workshop?" queried he.

"No; from Mr. Bland, in Rockdale. I *must* go. Goodbye, Mrs. Lipscomb; I hope you will soon be quite well again. Miss Mary"—as she kissed her, she whispered something in her ear, but Dr. Conway could not even guess what it was; nor could he hear the low answer, given with a smile. He had his hat again, and held the door open for Jennie, asking,

"May I see you home, Miss Jennie?"

"Thank you, Doctor. I hope you do not think I came on purpose to take *you* home," she said, laughing, and running down the steps, oblivious of his offered hand.

The wind was still high, and during the homeward walk Jennie seemed too much occupied in combating for her veil to have more than a passing word for her companion. He, too, was preoccupied, and scarcely a dozen remarks had passed between them when the hall door of Mr. Brown's house was closed behind them. The bluster shut out, she turned archly to speak to him, when she was arrested by the sound of music in the parlor; astonished, she paused to hear more. The strain was just finished, but a new one began—

a plaintive prelude, played by a masterly hand, then the words, in rich, full melody,

"Oh, had I wings like a dove, I would soar
Away from this world of care;
My soul would mount to the realms above,
And seek for a refuge there."

Jennie listened with finger on lip till the whole hymn was sung; then, with hushed step, went up-stairs without a word to the Doctor. When she had closed her door, he passed up to his room also. Shutting himself in, he stood a long time on the cold hearth smoking his meerschaum and spitting into the dead cinders. Finally he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and pulled his moustaches severely, as one harassed with troublesome thoughts—too troublesome it would seem for a man to harbor who was so eminently handsome, in such flourishing business, and who, moreover, had two girls in love with him, from either one of whom any other man in town would have been delighted to win a smile. There was the rub, in truth; in love as in company it was about to come to pass that "one more is too many."

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE TURN OF A GATE ON ITS HINGES.

THE bell of the only church-house of C—— was clanging out its loud call to Sabbath-school. Here, as in most villages of Texas, the leading denominations had united in building a house of worship, and claimed the use of it "Sunday about." The Sunday-school was also "union," and not

remarkable for any particular merit, except in its possession of a good "Estey" organ and an excellent choir; which fact pleased the majority of the citizens amazingly, but left a respectable minority very bitter against "instruments in church, and a high-falutin choir monopolizing the singing—a-hurrying a body up on some notes like a race-horse, and squallin' the others out like kingdom-come." A third class liked scientific music and good time, which "you don't get with *no* instrument like you can with the human voice alone." Some were for round notes; some, fa—sol—la; some, seven shapes. And so it had gone; each party failing in turn to maintain the supremacy it had been able to secure for a brief spell, till a few young people by pluck and money got the organ in, and drowned, by sheer and wilful sound, the dissensions, building up in course of time a band of music-loving spirits, who were able to carry the day.

Already groups of young men and children were gathering about the house; some frivolous girls, too, had gone on; but the working part of the Sunday-school was still at home.

Mary Lipscomb was looking out of the window at the people who passed—a shade of anxiety in her eyes belied the glad boast of yesterday. Though not pale, she looked weary; for her mother had passed a restless night, and moreover the house-work had all fallen upon her hands that morning. Jennie's arrangement about the "colored lady" had proved a failure, said lady having silently asserted her view of freedom by taking herself off as soon as the supper dishes were washed. But if the beautiful hands were weary, they were full of sweetness now—late roses, and chrysanthemums, yellow, red, white, and purple, culled from the little garden for the vases on the mantle. After she had lovingly put them to their places in order, and given a finishing touch of neatness

to the hearth, she brought her rocking-chair to the rug, and, Bible in hand, sat down to read and rest.

A step upon the porch. She opened the door to admit Dr. Conway. He was dressed unusually well this morning in a new suit, which yet displayed its original folds. The auburn hair and luxuriant beard were brushed to a state of perfection; linen immaculate; and a suspicion of wood-violet about the cambric handkerchief he placed in his breast pocket as he entered. Nevertheless, Dr. Conway did not appear to his best advantage this Sabbath morning. There was a restraint pervading his manner, which, with a less graceful man, would have been pronounced as awkwardness. He took Mary's hand in greeting, but released it sooner than was his wont; took a seat, to almost immediately leave it again for his favorite stand on the rug.

"How is Mrs. Lipscomb this morning, Miss Mary? can I see her?"

"She is sleeping, Doctor. She was restless during the early part of the night, and only went sound asleep near daylight, so I have not disturbed her; but I will now see if she has waked," and she moved to the door, to return a moment later saying the patient still slept.

"Do not let her be disturbed—sleep is her best remedy. Restless, was she? did she complain of any pain?"

"Not particularly; but I think she was feverish. Dr. Conway, *can there be any danger to mother?*"

The quaver in her low voice told the fear of her heart, even without the childish unbending of the lips. Dr. Conway was moved, and the hand he laid on her shining hair almost trembled, but he only said,

"No; I think not, my child. I can tell you more about it in a day or two. I will call again on my way from church;

she will be awake by that time." Then, as if to divert her mind, he continued in a lighter tone, "I wish you could go out to church to-day; it is lovely, and everybody and his second cousins will be out to hear the new preacher. We will miss you in the choir, too."

"Not much, I presume. All the others will be there, and you will have Mr. Dean besides, who is something beyond our mundane capacity by Jennie's estimation," and a little smile lit the weary face.

"The man *can* sing," said the Doctor dryly, all warmth gone again out of his manner, and a stiffness beyond that he brought in possessing him. He had been in the act of taking a flower from the vase, but now he left it, and, drawing on his gloves, made his best bow and shut the door behind him, leaving an added shade in the sweet eyes which sought in the flame-lights of the hearth for a reason for heaviness of heart. He had a good view of her face and attitude as he went down the steps, and his moustaches were raised with a half triumphant smile, and he stroked his beard fondly. At the gate he met Mr. Dean coming in. Holding open the little gate for the Doctor, he asked,

"How is Mrs. Lipscomb this morning?"

"I have not seen her. She is sleeping. Going to Sunday-school?" asked the Doctor, glancing at the Bible in Bob's hand.

"I thought I would. Is Miss Mary at leisure? Do you suppose I could see her a moment without interfering with her duties?"

"I have just left her very busy, looking at the parlor fire. *She* is not going out this morning."

"No? Well, I should suppose not, else *you* would not be going alone." Bob smiled pleasantly, and there was a

friendly look in his clear gray eyes, even if his heart-strings were tugged by the belief that his jest was the veriest truth.

"Well, I don't know about that," said Dr. Conway, flushing and trying to smile. He paused a moment longer, as if waiting; then, as Bob went in and shut the gate, he walked on.

He was exceedingly curious to know what Bob Dean wanted here this morning, but good breeding forbade a direct question. He, like many other men who never recognize the fact in themselves, was a little superstitious, and it was unpleasantly ominous to him that a single turn of that little gate on its hinges should shut him out and Bob in. He gathered his beard in his hand and went, not towards the church, but back to Mrs. Brown's.

When Bob came opposite the window of the sitting-room, Mary saw him and came to open the door before he rapped.

"You look tired this morning, Miss Mary. How *are* you?" he asked, laying in her hand a cluster of crimson forest leaves he had gathered in an early walk that morning.

"Quite well, I thank you. These are so pretty," she said, touching their glossy surfaces with fondness, ere she placed them a glowing centre to her bouquet on the mantle. Then she took from it a cluster of the starry white chrysanthemums and gave him, saying: "Gift for gift."

"Thanks! White for red. How is your mother this morning? The Doctor said she still slept."

"Yes, she is resting. She did not sleep much last night."

"Neither did her daughter," said Bob, scanning the pure face before him, now beginning to give plain evidence of weariness. "Won't you please rest?" he added, leading her to the easy-chair by the fire.

"I am not suffering," she said, laughing; "but I hope

you will excuse me for not asking you to be seated. I am inexcusably negligent of ceremony."

"I don't think our acquaintance is destined to be very ceremonious, it was begun in so abrupt a manner."

"No; really, Mr. Dean, I pray you will excuse me for laughing that day, it is another of my bad habits. Mother used to scold me for it when a child. Please have a chair."

"The laughing is all right. I like to see people laugh when it comes from the heart, as does yours. As for sitting, I have not time at present. I called, Miss Mary, to make inquiry about your mother, and offer my services in any way they can be useful. If there is any night-watching to be done, I hope you will allow me to share the burden with your other friends. *You* must sleep at night."

"Oh, I am sure you are very kind; but I hope mother will not be sick enough to need much nursing. Dr. Conway does not apprehend any danger."

"I hope there will be none, yet she may be feverish for several days. Is there anything I can do for you? I suppose you know I have been assigned your place in the choir to-day?"

"Yes, Jennie told me yesterday that she would press your services. She is very complimentary to your vocal powers."

"Indeed! She is very kind. I *do* love to sing, and my mother always loved to have me. Miss Jennie only spoke for effect, though."

Mary, looking up, was surprised at the moved expression of his face. Such a blending of conflicting emotions as was there portrayed—a tender pride and love for his mother, the pity for little Jennie that his words called up, and, above all, a repressed pain and the determined will to bear it. Mary at once began to wonder what the pain was about, and, like

any other woman, liked him better for having a trouble. She resolved to be very kind and friendly to him, but now she only said:

"You asked if there was anything you could do for me; I should like if you would take charge of my Sabbath-school class to-day. That is, if you like Sunday-school."

"Well, I do like Sunday-school," he said, smiling; "I always attend. I shall be glad to have something to do there, this morning. I intend having a class, by-and-by, but want to get a little acquainted first. Have you any special injunctions to lay upon me?"

"No; these are the lesson-papers," she said, handing him a package from the book-shelf. "The teachers all do as they please with their classes: our superintendent likes good singing; and then if the children answer the concert questions, he is perfectly satisfied. Almost every teacher has a different class-arrangement."

"If that is the system," said Bob, laughing, "I think I shall be able to fall into some feasible plan."

"Certainly you can; at any rate you can keep them behaving, which will be worth a great deal."

"Well, good-morning, Miss Mary. May I call this afternoon, to report your class's behavior, and inquire about your mother?"

"I shall be glad to see you; and so will she. Mother has taken quite a fancy to you."

"She is very kind. I hope you will take a nap after I am gone, and not be looking so tired when I come again."

Mary watched him from the window, as he went down the street, towards the church. There was something so kindly, and at the same time so genuine about the man, that he had already won a good feeling from those of the community who

had made his acquaintance; and now, as he walked on, with the same business air he carried all the week, he received many pleasant greetings from those who were abroad, for worship or for pleasure. Presently he met a group of boys, taking the opposite direction.

"Good-morning, young gentlemen. Is that Houston? Clarence? Why, which way?" laying a kindly hand on the shoulders of the two he recognized. "Sunday-school is not over, is it? Am I so late?"

The boys passed significant glances; then the one he had addressed as Clarence answered him.

"No, sir. They have n't begun yet. We boys were going for a walk."

Another one spoke out: "I belongs to Miss Mary Lipscomb's class, and I heard Dr. Conway say she would n't be there to-day; and when she ain't, Mr. Gooch allus sends old Miss Gibbs to hear our class, and she is so *deef* she can't hear, nohow, and so I thought I would n't go."

"Well, I have just seen Miss Lipscomb, myself, and she deputed me to take her place to-day. See! here are your new lessons. Suppose you all go back to Sunday-school and church with me, this morning, and, if you like, I will walk with you, this afternoon."

"All right," answered the boy. "I jist go to Sunday-school because I like to look at Miss Mary. But I 'd as lief hear you talk as not, and I never do know my lesson, nohow. Come on Clarence. You better come too, John—you and Steve."

"I believe I don't care to go this morning," answered the youth addressed; "Steve and I will go on down to the creek." And as Bob and his two recruits pursued their way, he added in a low, but audible tone, "he don't come none of his sneak-

ing, Methodist ways over me. Houston and Clarence are caught nice, now, ain't they? They'd give their hats to get off."

The boys with Bob looked at each other, and then Clarence spoke.

"He is mistaken, Mr. Dean, as for me. I am glad to go with you; only you must not back out of walking with us this evening."

"No danger from *me* there," said Bob, smiling. "You are to call at Mrs. Brown's for me after dinner if you want me; but if *you* conclude to back out, why, just don't come, and I shall ask you nothing about it to-morrow."

"'A-greedy,' as my brother, Robert Lee, said this mornin' when the new preacher took the chicken gizzard of'n the plate, when he wanted it hisself," and the lad, Houston Ludwig, squinted his prominent blue eyes between their sandy lashes, and producing a bran new "nigger-shooter" from the voluminous stock of varieties stowed in his breeches' pocket, proceeded to take a "bead" on the shining beaver of a much dressed legal gentlemen who was just passing the cross street ahead of our friends. But by the time the whizzing pebble projected had struck with a thwack, the boy was studiously perusing his Sunday lesson, which he coolly took from Bob Dean's hand at the opportune moment. It chanced that this lesson was on the seventeenth chapter of I. Samuel, and he drawlingly read aloud: "And David put his hand in his bag and took thence a stone and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead, and he fell upon his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and smote the Philistine and slew him, but there was no sword in the hand of David."

Bob could not help laughing as he remonstrated, "But David's sling was not a 'nigger-shooter,' Houston."

"Reckin not? But he would a had one if he'd knowed how to make it."

"And Mr. Arbuckle is no Philistine," said Clarence.

"He thinks he's bigger 'n any Goliath. But then I ain't David either, so the 'nalergy is lost for want of resemblance, as Mr. Dean remarked Friday, when I said in my composition that my sense was like a tarantuler, because it could go in any direction 'thout takin' time to turn round."

Though the others laughed, Houston did not even smile, being engaged in adjusting the forked stick of his weapon over his own freckled nose, and drawing the rubber band under his chin. Then puffing out his cheeks, he made a long, shrill whistle, put his "nigger-shooter" in his pocket, and subsided into a respectable dignity before they reached the church door.

When they went in the choir was just beginning to sing. Jennie was playing the organ, but was restlessly watching for Bob's appearance. He took his place by her side in time to bear up her voice in the second stanza. When the third was begun, many faces were turned towards them, attracted by the pure, full tones, that it seemed might swell to the heavens without trying their power. Dr. Conway was by his side, and could not but notice how Jennie caught her breath and stopped to listen. But as for Bob himself, he was all unconscious of the sensation he was creating, for, as he had told Mary, he loved to sing, and when he sang he did nothing else. His soul was in the music, and he, for the time being, had as little of earthly thought about him as if he had been the very angel to which Jennie had compared him. But Dr. Conway did not enjoy the music so well as to fail to take note of the white flowers he held so tightly between the thumb and finger of his right hand, and he, the Doctor,

would have given a good deal to know whether he had himself plucked them from the border inside the little gate where they grew, or had received them a gift from another.

The song ended, the classes were distributed, and Bob soon had his hands full, figuratively speaking. Mary's class, today in his charge, consisted of eleven boys between fourteen and seventeen years of age. A strange class for a young lady, you think. It came to pass thus: They had had several teachers, and had been neither attentive nor orderly. The superintendent was about to give them in charge of an elderly gentleman of the body, when the boys rebelled, saying they would quit if he took the class. Then the officer, who was of yielding temper, fond of peace and popularity, proposed they should elect a teacher from the Bible-class consisting of young ladies and gentlemen. Houston Ludwig proposed Miss Mary Lipscomb, and the boys elected her by acclamation. The superintendent was nonplussed, but agreed to submit the case to Miss Mary's choice. When the circumstances were related to her, after pondering the matter a moment, she quietly announced her intention of accepting the honor, saying: "I believe I can manage them, Mr. Gooch, if you are willing."

She was forthwith installed, and *had* managed them so successfully, that Mr. Gooch immediately concluded to give all his troublesome classes to young ladies. He had placed one in charge of Jennie Brown, but a few weeks later was disgusted at finding all the little boys had deserted their class, and their places were filled by young men from the Bible class, and that they and Jennie were having a "good time." He stopped the proceeding, at which Jennie took offence, and had not put in her appearance since, until this morning, when she came to show off her mother's new boarder, whose simple

presence in the house would be considered as equivalent to a conquest on her part, by those who were acquainted with her charms and habits. Now Mr. Gooch came forward, and made so much of her, that Jennie, who loved flattery too well to remain long angry with any one, graciously consented to take her old place in the Bible-class.

Dr. Conway plead the calls of his profession as an excuse from regular attendance, but to-day he, too, joined the class. To little purpose, though, for Jennie was blindly oblivious of his presence, and attended to her lesson so assiduously, that Mr. Gooch upbraided himself with not having given her justice in his estimation of her ability. The Doctor amused himself with watching Bob, over in the corner, talking to his boys, who were, for once, giving attention to the matter in hand. He even envied Bob his enthusiasm in the work. When the morning services were over, Bob left in advance of the others, and walked home alone.

CHAPTER IX.

BEATRICE.

"DO you smoke?"

"Not now, thank you."

"So you do, sometimes. I am glad of it."

"And why?"

"Oh, the thought takes away an implied reproach. Nothing spoils a good cigar so quickly as to have its fellow declined with a gentle wave of the hand, and a sanctimonious 'I do not use the weed in any form.' I suppose this form of vice, like

misery, is social," and Dr. Conway blew a perfect circle of the fragrant smoke up to the ceiling.

"Then you cannot, like the notable divine, convince yourself that you 'smoke a good cigar to the glory of God'?" asked Bob Dean.

"No. I don't try. Do you?" The Doctor's words were careless, but his glance sought Bob's face keenly.

"No, sir."

"Then you, too, smoke solely for pleasure."

"Again, no."

"Then, why *do* you smoke, if you please?"

"I don't."

"The deuce you don't! What a man! Well, then, why don't you? I feel in an investigating frame of mind, and, like Rosa Dartle, I ask for information."

"I like to give information. I acquired the habit once, but found it annoyed my mother—she is troubled with asthma—so I left it off rather than deprive myself of her company."

"I think I should appreciate a good mother"—puff—"gone out—another match, please—thanks"—puff—puff—"I have never had one as far as practical knowledge would certify; but she would need to be a model of comfort if she would make up to me for the pleasure I get out of smoke"—puff-f-f-f.

Dr. Conway was the embodiment of comfort as he sprawled his magnificent person in front of Bob Dean's fire this Sunday afternoon. Dinner on Sunday at Mrs. Brown's was always immense, and both of our friends having partaken liberally to-day, they were in condition to enjoy easy chat by the fire, free from the restraint of ladies' society. The Doctor had donned his dressing-gown, a marvel of cashmere, silk quilt-

ing, and tassels; but Bob, after removing his coat, had sat down "in his shirt sleeves," as the ladies say. He too had a nice gown packed away in his trunk, but he never put it on if he could help it. Now, with hands clasped behind his curly pate, and big feet beating time to the momentum of his rocking-chair, he looked no less comfortable than the man beside him—perhaps no less graceful, if well-knit muscle might count instead of delicate moulding.

"I pity the man who never had a mother," said Bob, taking his hands down and unconsciously opening a locket which hung from his chain. Dr. Conway reached for it and looked at the sweet face it inclosed.

"This is yours. Very like you. She thinks a deal of you I should judge." A smile answers the remark; but Bob continues,

"Then you may have to make the same sacrifice for some other lady."

"No, sir; never! my girl must like smoke; if she does n't she will have to take to it or my allegiance is out with a puff-f-f."

"Don't boast, man, unless you know your ground. Perhaps you have already ascertained the lady's taste?"

The question was not premeditated, but still Bob hoped the answer might give him some light on the portentous query which he was ever settling, only to be unsettled the next moment by his fluctuating hopes—whether Mary Lipscomb had committed her heart irretrievably into Dr. Conway's keeping.

"Ha! ha! Really that is hardly a level question; but—well I don't mind saying that the taste is all right if I could only ascertain which were the lady." He shut his eyes while he rolled out a volume of smoke.

"If I have been rightly informed, that ought not to be

hard to decide. I understand you have only to reach forth your hand to pluck the fairest flowers of this promising commonwealth."

"Pshaw! somebody has been allowing his imagination a fearless flight"—puff—puff. The Doctor tried to conceal the smirk which betrayed his gratified vanity; he knew it was bad taste to be pleased. "I say, Dean, were you ever at a loss what to do simply because you knew you could do as you pleased? because the choice lay entirely with yourself found yourself unable to choose?"

Did the man mean that he might have Mary Lipscomb's love if he chose, but debated whether he would accept it? Heavens! how Bob's blood surged; but he kept himself down, and answered the spoken words only.

"No, Doctor, I do not remember ever to have had a perfectly free choice. My circumstances have always forced themselves on me, or I had to make them to order. As far back as I can recollect, I have known beforehand what I would do if only I could bring events about to make my purpose feasible."

"Well, it has been different with me. I have always been a lucky fellow without much deserts, and have found myself continually called upon to decide between two or more pleasant things, which I was always unable to do, because unwilling to forego either, and which invariably resulted in not deciding at all, but just drifting along until events decided themselves. And I should not be surprised if it turned out that way in this case too—puff-f-f."

A caged beast was tearing around in Bob Dean's bosom. He would have given a month's salary out of his labor money to enjoy the privilege of planting the square toe of his number eight boot in Dr. Conway's smirking mouth, and not have to

take himself to task for it afterwards. Poor Bob! He had prided himself for several years back upon having every impulse of feeling under perfect control, now he finds himself a very child, whose temper is ruthlessly jarred by words light as air. Talk of a man knowing his own nature before he falls in love, or of controlling the tenor of his passion after he does! He poured out and drank a glass of water, then walked to the window.

"Where did you get that? It is a remarkable face."

"That" was a crayon drawing of a woman's head in a mounted frame standing on the mantle shelf. Dr. Conway had risen and was inspecting it. The face was a curious admixture of dreamy alertness, dark, spiritual, not beautiful, but fascinating.

"It is the portrait of a friend of mine in Austin, a very interesting young lady, as her features indicate."

"Not a photograph?"

"No; crayon. She is an artist, and drew it herself before a mirror."

"Of course, flattered the original," said the Doctor, with a smile.

"Somewhat, and yet hardly. She has exaggerated the expression of the eyes, while she loses much of the vivacity of outline."

"Are you well acquainted? Intimate?"

Bob's looks indicated that he thought the Doctor impertinently curious, but his answer was quiet and seemingly easy. "We saw a good deal of each other a few months ago while rehearsing for a cantata—a charity benefit. Some tableaux followed, in which she represented the picture of Beatrice de Cenci. It suited her face, and I told her so, at the same time remarking that I would like to have her portrait, *en cos-*

tume. Soon afterward she sent me this, hence the attitude and apparel."

"Yes, yes, I see. And the name 'Beatrice' written below, and something else in— What is the language? Spanish?"

"Italian," said Bob, smiling; but he did not translate the sentence for the Doctor. "Hist! some one calls."

"I suppose it is somebody after me. I never fixed myself up right comfortably since I entered my professional career, but I was wanted immediately." Going to the front window, he added, "Yes, it is for old Mrs. Vinson. I know the boy."

He raised the sash and answered that he would be down directly, and, expressing regret at resigning his comfortable quarters, he was gone. In a few moments he passed out of the stable-yard gate on his strong sorrel horse, and rode off in a gallop.

Bob had hardly settled himself comfortably for reading when his boy friends, as by appointment, came to claim fulfilment of his morning's promise. After trudging nearly two miles through the yet brilliant woods of Black-Jack, Post Oak, and Haw, and contriving to instruct as well as amuse his young companions, he dismissed them and started home by another road. He wanted to be alone and to walk rapidly, the best panacea he had ever found for a mind disturbed. But presently he reached a place where the road divided, and having some doubt which was his way, he turned aside to make inquiry at a house which stood about a rod off the road. He little thought these unwitting steps, taken without debate, would place in his hands the first link of a chain of circumstances, whose tangled conclusion should be many days hence. As he approached the house he observed with surprise that Dr. Conway's horse was tied to the rail fence in front, and on coming nearer he recognized the "tow-head" sallow-faced

lad who was lounging on the fence as the same who had, a few hours ago, called at Mrs. Brown's for the Doctor. Bob had now, however, no opportunity of further acquaintance with him; for when the boy saw him approach he slid down from the fence and disappeared behind the corn-crib in the corner of the yard, and a moment later *his* tow-head and sallow face, in company with two lesser ones of the same pattern and color, protruded from the hiding-place with the purpose of taking another view of the stranger. But when the eyes which belonged to the several heads caught his own, they again retreated behind their fortification, only to repeat the exploit a moment later. Bob smiled; for he had not been enough in the country to learn that this conduct was not unusual in the juvenile Texans of the rural districts.

The house was what is known as a "double-log"—two rooms built near together, with the passage between covered overhead and in this instance without floor. It stood with its gable to the road. There was no gate, but in the line of the path approaching the house the fence was lowered to three rails. Over this Bob stepped, and passing round the first building was about to call to make his presence known, when a young girl came out of the further room with a bucket, which she took to the well to fill. She did not see him, and he supposing there was sickness in the house did not desire to disturb the family unnecessarily, so he waited until she should return. He observed that the girl was slight, and moved with a swift, light step. Presently she came back with the water, and, seeing him, set down the bucket and came forward. Her appearance was peculiar;—her face was pale and sallow, her hair dull, her features pinched; but her eyes were big, blue, and staring. They were so wide open and bright as to look almost wild. She did not speak, and before

Bob addressed her she signed to him that she was deaf, but would go in and bring some one to talk to him. Her absence was prolonged until his patience was exhausted. He called twice, but got no answer; whereupon, he walked around to the other side of the house. Here was a rude porch, where some attenuated balsam vines had clambered, which were now brown and sere. Standing here, prodding a pair of rusty scissors in the box of mould which had nourished the vines, was a young woman. By her side stood Dr. Conway, holding one of her nervous, red hands on the edge of the box with his slender left, while his right arm lay around her form. His head was bent forward until his beard touched her face. There was no doubt that he was making love to the poor girl. Behind them in the doorway, silent and motionless as if chained to the floor, was the deaf-mute. Her eyes met Bob's, and a significant look passed which plainly said they viewed the scene alike. The wind was blowing smartly toward Bob, and the lovers did not hear his approach. He had no desire the Doctor should know he had witnessed his love scene, so he stepped back out of sight and called,

"Hello!"

Dr. Conway came quickly to the end of the porch.

"Hello! Why, Dean, is it you? What in the world are you doing in these parts? I should expect to find you in more congenial quarters, at this time."

"That is what I am now seeking. I came out for a walk, and am in some doubt concerning my way back."

Bob answered quietly, and his face was very grave.

"Lost your way, hey? Well, I am glad you don't know *everything*. You *are* only human, after all," said the Doctor, laughing and stroking his luxuriant beard.

"I don't know the roads in this country," said Bob, dryly.

"You would be pretty wise, if you did. With my experience, I can claim only a sufficiency of information on that score. But up there at the forks, the right is your nearest way back to town."

"Thanks."

"Say! if you are not in a hurry, I will be through here presently, and will go with you. I have a patient out here," —he stopped to feel in his breast-pocket for his cigars and match-case—"an old lady I have been treating for some time,"—puff, puff—"and thought she was about off my hands, but this morning she relapsed, and I am afraid she will yet put to test the 'great question.'"

Bob Dean's gray eyes were looking through and beyond the man talking to him, and he answered:

"Thank you, Doctor; I will not trouble you; you are riding and I walking; we are not on equal grounds. Will you put me in the way to get a drink of water?"

The Doctor's eyebrows went up, and he turned to the young woman who had moved into sight behind him, and stood rolling the corner of her apron with nervous fingers, and drawing quick, heavy breaths; his voice was gentle and insinuating when he addressed her:

"Miss Agnes, will you please get my friend some water?"

She turned slowly away, looking back suspiciously.

Bob wanted to close the scene as soon as possible; so he followed her around the house, toward the well. In an instant the mute girl came up and handed him the water; she had understood his request by his lips' motion, and flew in advance of her slow-stepping sister. As he took the gourd from her hand their eyes met. He could not read exactly what hers struggled to tell him, but saw that they were troubled and pleading. She perceived his doubt; then she swept her hand

over her chest, mimicking Dr. Conway's habit of stroking his beard, glanced towards her sister, who was now leaning against the wall of the house, and pressed her fingers tightly together on her lips. He understood that she begged secrecy about what they had both just discovered. In the first flush of anger she had condemned them, to him, but now feared and plead for them. Bob bowed his head, and laid his hand on his heart. She smiled—a broken gleam, like a ray of light on a pool of sluggish, dark water—and her eyes spoke the thanks the poor thing could not utter.

Dr. Conway saw the signs that passed between them, but erred in his interpretation. He thought she had wanted to be assured that Bob was an acquaintance of his, and that Bob's heart gesture was to indicate friendship for himself.

Ah, Doctor, your sight needs be keener now, if you would keep pace with these fast moving consequences of your duplicity.

Never had there been in his heart less feeling of friendship for any man than for Dr. Conway, as Bob Dean passed out of the yard and pursued his walk. His hands are thrust deep down in his pockets, his head bent forward, and the lines about his mouth are hard and stern. He even talks to himself—a habit quite unusual with him.

"The man is a mere trifler, or worse! I had thought better of him. He looks like a gentleman, but unless something is done about it, he will bring harm to that poor girl yonder, and perhaps much trouble to some other folks. And to think that she should love him! Oh, Mary Lipscomb, dear treasure, must I give you up to *him?* I have always said no man of honor would try to win another man's sweetheart; but you, pure-souled woman, you do not know him. And now, what ought I to do? I wish I could talk it over with mother."

He plunged on with heavy strides, his brain-wheels and heart-strokes keeping time with the movement of his strong legs. When he came to the brook which purled across the road, he stooped and bathed his head in the cool water, and drying with his handkerchief, concluded, as he replaced it in his pocket, to "wait a while and watch and think. I shall go to spend the Christmas holidays with mother, and we will talk about it." By the time he reached home he had recovered his usual composure.

When he came to the little front gate he found Jennie leaning on it, apparently watching for some one. Now Bob did not, for one moment, suppose it was for himself Jennie was waiting. On the other hand, he was quite confident Dr. Conway was the expected one, and the thought brought back upon him the full flood of bitterness.

Be the truth told, it did not matter much to Jennie Brown which came first. She was lonesome, and wished some one (some one always meant some *man*) would come. True, she loved Dr. Conway with the best part of her selfish little heart; but she liked Bob, too; and he was good-looking and interesting, and, more than all, was *new*, and might prove a conquest. Her heart was aching pretty sorely, and had been for some time, over the uncertainty of the Doctor's status towards her, and she fain would soothe it with "new worlds to conquer." But she "counted without her host," when she reckoned on a flirtation with Bob Dean in his present frame of mind. He had changed his opinion of that form of diversion since noon to-day; he had not had much experience in the line, and thought now that he would never extend his knowledge. But, then, he felt a great pity for the pretty little girl before him, and made a quick resolve to be a good friend to her. And what more does any woman want to win her way to the

heart of man than pity and Platonic friendship? She held the gate fast and said:

"Too late; gate's closed, sir."

"What's the toll?"

"I am like the highway robber—all you've got."

What an opening for a gallant speech! Poor Bob only said, "Here it is," and handed her a bunch of lichens he had plucked coming through the woods.

"No, sir; that is not all. You've a flower in your buttonhole; I'll take that, too."

Why did he blush and cover the drooping blossom with his protecting hand? only because it was the little chrysanthemum of the morning memory, and sacred—so sacred. He laughed, and said gently,

"You can't have this; fair fingers have touched it, and it is exempt from duty. I shall have to find a cheaper thoroughfare," and laying his hand on the low fence he sprang over at a bound.

"You're a nice man!" said she, pouting, "to trespass on a lady's domain like that."

"If my sins of trespass stop with that I think I shall find pardon."

"Are you contemplating some new vandalism? hope I sha'n't be the victim."

"No; you will not be the victim, little woman," said Bob with an undertone of tenderness in his deep voice.

Jennie looked up in surprise. She had been talking at random, but now saw he was not. Instantly her face was suffused; and, half in anger half in tears, exclaimed,

"What *do* you mean, Mr. Dean? *you* are not jesting."

"No; I am not jesting. Just what I did mean perhaps I shall tell you some day; but now let us make a 'paction,' as

the Scotch say, and agree not to fall out with each other in the meantime. Will you shake hands on it?"

"Yes," said Jennie, all coquetry gone and for the time really in earnest. "I would like you for a friend above all things," and she laid her plump, brown hand in his broad palm. "What are the conditions?"

"Mutual help and confidence," said he. "You are, on no account, to set yourself out to work against my interest, and I will watch over yours to the best of my ability."

Just then Jennie's restless eyes fell on the white flower in his button-hole; it furnished the clue to his meaning. She knew where he had gotten it. None of that kind grew anywhere in town except at Mrs. Lipscomb's. She remembered how his hand had shielded it from her threat a few moments ago. With these thoughts came a new revelation, namely, that their interests were in reality the same, and that Bob had indirectly referred to this. Her expressive face showed more of her thoughts than she knew; for, searching her eyes, he asked, laughing,

"Well, is it a bargain?"

She looked deliberately and meaningly at him and answered a deep spoken "Yes."

"I will be true to you," said he, giving the little hand a firm grasp ere he released it.

Dr. Conway rode up in time to see the hand-clasping. Their faces were neither cool nor unconcerned, and the Doctor made another mistake in reading signs, and did not like the signs, either. Now he went round to the stable and tended his own horse; then, entering the house through the back hall, passed up to his room without meeting any of the family. He lit his pipe and seated himself by the window with his feet on the ledge. The autumnal sun was near setting, and

its golden sheen lit the landscape to a degree of beauty which might have delighted a more critical eye than Dr. Conway's. The fact was he did not see it at all. His thoughts were troublesome, and he had seated himself with his narcotic comforter to "look at things a little." Now you and I, reader, have advantage of his friends and acquaintances. Had any of them entered his room just then they would have supposed the Doctor was tired and enjoying his pipe and ease. We readers and writers of fiction have the liberty vouchsafed us of doing such impolite things as eavesdropping and reading people's thoughts. The Doctor's ran in this wise:

"I declare I don't know what to make of it! Of course Jennie will flirt with him, but whether he would like to flirt or to marry, how can I tell? Wonder if he saw anything out yonder this afternoon? there is never any telling what he knows with that deuced quiet face of his. I am afraid of the fellow, though I don't believe he would do anything underhanded—he would give me fair warning before he would move against me. In that case I think I could come up to him. *Of course he never made love to a country girl for fun!* Well, on the whole, I do not suppose he ever did; he seems to be of a different sort. There is no use in disguising the fact from myself—he is just a splendid man, and Jennie knows it and likes him too, and so does Mary, and so will every one else that sees much of him. But that is no reason I should let him interfere with any of my plans. By Jove! I wish I could find out what my plans are; I would know better what to do. Jennie is pretty enough for anybody, and sweet and bright, and the little coquette loves me *now*. She is only trying to make me jealous by carrying on with Dean—but, then, that is dangerous play for one of her temperament. She will love the man most that she is with the most, partic-

ularly if other people like him too. Well, why should n't I be quiet and let her get in with him? 'twould let me out of the charge of flirting her. If I only *knew* that Stillinger *would n't* crowd me on that note I could rest easy, and go and marry the woman I love better than all the world. But Mary has nothing to help me with, and we 'd have to wait a good while before we could marry, and then be poor and pinched; then Stillinger might come down on me, though he says he won't. I could n't bear to see her, my queen, deprived of what she wanted, neither would I like to do without my luxuries myself. If Stillinger *should* crowd me, why—forty-seven hundred dollars is no trifle to a new professional like me; 'twould just *ruin* me. And yet, she is *so* sweet I don't see how I could give her up. I can see the shadow I left in her starry eyes this morning by my distant manner. I really believe she loves me, but she is so guileless, yet so modest, it is hard to tell. I suppose if I were to go off where I could never see her—puff—puff—puff—f-f-fe. But then Jennie—I know I can get her, and old Anthony says she will have a cool thirty thousand her own unreservedly the day she marries or gets of age. Five thousand would let me out with Stillinger and all his ilk and leave a neat twenty-five thousand for us, to say nothing of what would come to us when the old folks die. Decidedly comfortable state of affairs. And, as I said, Jennie is nice enough for any fellow, even my good-looking and luxurious self. Heigh-ho! I wish I knew what to do." He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, refilled, and walked the floor with long strides, continuing his thought-argument. "I will try to keep a hold on both of them for a little while yet. If that cattle speculation with Gorden turns out well, I can afford to marry my darling for love; otherwise, 'Ah, Mary, good-bye,' and I will take Jennie for comfort;

she is a dear little trick after all. Hark! is that her voice? yes; and Dean is accompanying her. She admires his singing; I'll go down."

CHAPTER X.

SEVERAL SCENES.

MONDAY morning dawned with a sullen, dispirited aspect. By seven o'clock a slow, nasty rain had set in; it was none of your stirring, vehement affairs, but a steady drip, drip, that sent one's spirits down faster than the mercury.

Breakfast over, Bob Dean buttoned up his overcoat, and under his umbrella was soon plodding his way to the school-house; plodding, because the wet roads forbade any other gait. But there was no hint of the plodder in his erect head and cheerful face. He had evidently found comfort from somewhere since yesterday evening. He carried the air of a man who stood fair with himself, and had nothing against his neighbors. Calling at the post-office, he found a letter from his mother. 'Twould have done any woman's heart good to see his face light up as he held it a moment looking at the fair superscription before he put it in his breast-pocket.

"Seems to please you, sir," said the clerk; "from a lady, too,—suppose I must not tell the young ladies round here how proud you are to get it."

"Expect you had as well not," answered Bob, willing to indulge the youth in his pleasantry.

When he reached the school-house the boys had a good fire, and, for a wonder, the floor was swept, not showing *very* many muddy tracks considering that boys had the occupancy. Bob

looked cheerfully around. "Thank you, boys; whom shall I thank for your forethought?"

"It was Houston, Mr. Dean! it was Houston Ludwig! What do you reckon is the matter of him?" cried several voices.

"Houston, you have laid me under obligation for the day."

"Then let's count even for yistiddy," said the boy, unabashed by the notice he had called down on himself.

Smiling, Bob continued: "Hereafter we will have a regular arrangement for distributing our work of that kind, so that it will fall equally on all. You will find the committee list for wood, fire-making, sweeping, and water posted on the blackboard this afternoon, and I feel quite sure I shall not have to call your attention to it any further. And now, boys, I have just received a letter from my mother, and I wish you to be quiet and studious while I read it." Seated in his high chair, his hand shading his eyes, he was soon absorbed in its contents. The boys *were* quiet but not studious, unless himself were the task he had set them to learn. Black eyes, blue, gray, brown, and nondescript were fastened on him, and many a speculation chased through boyish brain, many a resolve formed in boyish heart while the letter was being read. It finished, folded, and replaced in pocket, Bob with another "Thank you, boys," rang the bell for prayers. A few verses of Bible reading, then his rich voice was raised in prayer, such prayer as those boys seldom heard in church—a coming close to their individual wants, until it seemed to several there that he must have seen into their hearts. Even the irreverent (you will find such among any forty boys) were awed into a respect for the suppliant, if not for the supplication. Prayers over, another tap of the little bell and a different air fell on the whole room. The once tender, pleading tone

of the master now rung out question and explanation with an energy that was infectious. A busy hum of study as an accompaniment to the louder tone of the reciting class—oh, who does not know it all by heart! Let us leave him alone with his work. He has been installed so short a time it is not fair that visitors should intrude.

Afternoon—still raining—a hopeless drip, drip, with no prospect of a break. All nature looked sympathetic. Even the pertinacious chrysanthemums in the Widow Lipscomb's front yard looked depressed, and not a few sonsie blossoms had succumbed to the adverse weather. But indoors at the same domicile a different atmosphere pervaded. As to the room itself, though its appointments spoke of rigid economy long and persistently practised, it would be hard to find a more home-like spot. I think the rooms people live in get sometimes to partake of the character of its dwellers. This is the reason I am so often led into talking about the *houses* my "brain people" are found in. The carpet was faded and worn, and had never in its best estate been of a quality to boast its fineness, though chosen for body and wear. But before the immaculate hearth was a soft rug of bright colors, which seemed to smile at its fair manufacturess who was passing about putting little finishing touches of neatness to the furniture. Curtains of plain muslin looped with bands of pressed forest leaves, grasses, and immortelles. A few shelves of choice books and a splendid piano, the only thing of much value in the room, finished the details, excepting the easy-chair in which Mary now seated herself, and the lounge on which her mother quietly lay—she was not sleeping; for, as her daughter drew her chair near and took up her sewing, she reached out and took the long white hand in her toil-worn palm, saying,

"Don't sew, darling; I want you to talk to me."

"Yes, mother," and gladly she put away the sewing and took possession of her mother's other hand.

"Mary, I have waited for you to tell me of your own will, but it does n't seem as if you intended to do so; I can't wait always, child!—how is it with you and Dr. Conway? he is not to you as others who come about you."

"Mother,"—it seemed she could get no further just then, for she turned her suffused face away a moment in silence; a curious quaver was in her voice when she resumed with a mighty effort,—"it is as you have suspected; he *is* more to me than others who come around. I have intended to tell you all along; you know I never have shut anything up in my heart away from you, but I thought I would wait until you were well again."

"Have you promised to marry him, Mary?"

"Oh, mother! you know I would not do that without talking to you about it, nor has he asked me to marry him; he has not even told me in so many words that he loved me, but—"

"But what, my child?" a tender, sympathetic pressure of the clasped hands opened the flow of confidence to a freer current.

"But whenever he is with me his every look and action tells it only too plainly. I cannot be blind to their purport, nor would I appear so to him; for you know, mother, I am no coquette, and"—her hand lets go her mother's to hide the love-lit eyes—"I have not tried to disguise the truth from him that it makes me very happy to know it."

"You say he has not told you in so many words that he loves you. Don't you think the straightforward way would be to avow his feelings directly, instead of looking them for months together? He has had opportunity."

Mary's eyes are turned toward her mother now, and the fire in their startled depths is almost indignant. "Do you mean that he could trifle with me? Ah, no, mother, you do not know him." Now the fire is quenched in tears of tenderness. "He has not *tried* to display his love to me; only his eyes and his voice tell it, and he cannot help it." A caught breath, and she adds in a lower tone as if too precious to speak aloud, and only given lest with the withholding his reputation should suffer, "Before he went away he told me he wanted to see me alone when he returned; and he had a question to ask me whose answer involved the happiness of his life; and the other night at Mrs. Brown's he asked me when I would grant him that interview. I told him he must wait till the surgical operation was over and you were well again. He said he would give anything to get out of performing it; that, knowing how much was at stake, he could not help being nervous about it."

"Then why did n't he let Mr. Dean do it? In my opinion *he* knows more about his business now than Dr. Conway ever will."

Mrs. Lipscomb's words are a little sharp. Mary did not answer. She began to realize for the first time that her mother did not love *her* lover, and she was wounded. The shadow was not lost on her parent, for the tone was softened as she continued,

"Do not think, my darling, that your confidence is not appreciated, and that I do not feel keenly every throb of your precious heart; but to be plain with you, I have not been satisfied with the Doctor of late; in several things he has seemed slippery. I saw him with Jennie Brown the other day when you were not by, and any third person would have taken them to be avowed lovers."

"Oh, mother! Jennie would have any man make love to her if she wanted him to; did n't you notice her with Mr. Dean the other night?"

"Yes; that is so. Well she need n't think to make a fool of Bob Dean! he is too straightforward and sensible and honest—yes, honest is the word—to be entrapped by such a flippant coquette as she."

"Yet that kind of man often becomes fascinated by his opposite; the gravest minds fancy the veriest butterflies; and Jennie is a sweet little thing, mother."

"Yes, Jennie has a kind heart and plenty of sense if she would only use it; but I should regret to know that Mr. Dean was in love with her. I don't know when I have met a person whom I liked and trusted so much on short acquaintance as I do him. I seem to have known him always."

"Do you know I feel just that way too, and have from my first unexpected meeting that day in the wind. I am glad to feel we have a friend in him. How he loves his mother! have you heard him speak of her?"

"Yes; I should like to know her."

They fall into silence, broken presently by a deep sigh from the elder. Mrs. Lipscomb is troubled. The keen mother eyes see farther into human nature than do those lustrous orbs of her fair young daughter; and this daughter is the most precious thing in the world to her, and she is not willing Dr. Conway should have her. Troublesome thoughts are depressing. The rain outside falls drip, drip, and the wood-fire crackles and crunches, and presently Mrs. Lipscomb is asleep on her comfortable lounge.

Poor Mary is hurt, deeply hurt. She feels that her mother is unjustly prejudiced against her lover; but she knows that Mrs. Lipscomb rarely changes her opinion of people, and she

knows moreover, though just now she is unwilling to acknowledge the fact to herself, that this opinion is generally correct. "It is because mother loves me so well," she muses, watching with solicitude the pale face of the sleeper. "It arouses her jealousy to see the Doctor flirt with Jennie, while she knows he is addressing me." She blushes with fond joy, and the sweet eyes are almost tearful with humble pride—the adjective is not misused—as she ponders on the happiness that fills her being. "Why he should love me I cannot imagine; he is so grand, so noble, so modest. Though he has not said the very words, 'I love you,' he does not need to, for he has said as much indirectly twenty times over, and he knows I trust him. I am *so* grieved that mother has lost confidence in him; but she certainly will get over it again; she used to like him. We will wait and show her how true he can be. Oh, Duval! my noble love!" She was astonished at her own boldness, and glanced around to see if the walls had heard her whisper, inaudible save to her own shell-like ears. Dear reader, do not pass adverse judgment on my heroine and condemn her as a mere romantic, namby-pamby simpleton! She is only eighteen, and her woman's heart is won for the first time. Her lover *is* grand and handsome and true looking, and she has not seen much of man-nature. In every true woman's life there comes a time of this trusting, self-abnegating, perfect surrender on the altar of love; happy is she to whom it comes at the one right time—when the God of the Temple is assigned by Fate to be her own loving, lawful husband. Then the fervid libations to Eros are supplanted by their own calmly tended Lares and Penates.

Mary's musing was interrupted by the rattling of the door-latch; then the door was opened and there came a light footstep into the room. Mary turned and held out a welcoming

hand to the intruder, but did not speak, for it was the deaf-mute whom Bob Dean had seen the previous day at the cabin in the country. This girl was an orphan, who with her sister Agnes had long made a home with their aged grandmother. They had gained a support by taking washing until a few weeks previous to the opening of my story; then the family had been increased by the advent of the widow and four children of the old woman's dead son, who, left penniless, had come to the only home they could claim, poor as it was. Then the grandmother, Mrs. Vinson, had concluded to get the girls homes in the village, where they could do housework for their board and clothes, "and be one of the family," this last clause the leading proviso; for, though starving poor, the whole connection would have been outraged had one of them hired out and received the regular wages of a servant. Agnes was headstrong and stolid, and her temper had proved incompatible with any family so far tested; but Laura, the younger, was quick, neat, and faithful, and spite of her sad infirmity had found a good home with Mrs. Lipscomb. She had now been absent for several days with her sick grandparent; but the old woman was better to-day, and she had returned to her new home. Mary, speaking by means of a system of signs well understood between them, asked her some questions, then went out with her to give directions about the housework. As they passed into the kitchen, Mary laid her hand on the girl's shoulder and discovered that she was quite wet; for it was still raining, and Laura had only stopped to put off her shawl before presenting herself. Mary shook her head in reproof, and told her to change her clothing, adding with a smile of kindness that she would be sick. The sympathy expressed in her solicitude stirred some new feeling in the girl; for, suddenly seizing Mary's hand, she

pressed it to her lips and heart; then, spreading out her arms beyond, went through the motion of warding off an imaginary danger. Her eyes were full of passion. Mary was astonished, for she had never before seen her exhibit any strong emotion. She had seemed to be singularly devoid of excitability, and Mary had grown to think of her, as we all are prone to think of the deaf, the blind, and the insane, as in a measure shut out from the ordinary passions of life.

"What is it, Laura?"

The girl's wide blue eyes filled with tears, and she swept her hand over her chest and stamped her foot angrily.

"What has the Doctor done to offend you?" repeated Mary, recognizing the symbol, while she could not repress a smile at what she believed to be a child's whim.

Laura made no answer; either she reconsidered her intention of informing on the recreant lover, or despaired of making herself understood; for she gave a gulping sob, dried her eyes on her sleeve, and, while a kind of hardness settled on her pallid face, turned to the stove and busied herself with scraping out the ashes in order to make a fire.

Mary was puzzled, but did not know how to solve the mystery. When she returned to the parlor she found her mother had retired to her own room, and requested to be left alone as she felt like sleeping again. So Mary went into the adjoining chamber, which she called her own, though she slept with her mother; a very little room it was, but as neat as the others, and if possible a bit more cosy; but it had no fire to-day, and it was business, not pleasure, which had brought her into it. Seating herself at the little old table, she took a leather-bound account-book from the drawer and looked it over; then she made some figures at the bottom of the last written page, turned over to another and ran her eyes over

the contents. Drawing a deep sigh she took out her purse, a very unobtrusive affair whether the point considered be its material or its plethora; she carefully counted the few bills, made a little pile of the silver pieces, and then took a view of the whole matter—the little pile, the few bills, the unobtrusive purse, known necessities and possible contingencies; with the probability of the first two named meeting the demand of the two last, she summed it up thus: "I hope it won't give out. There is not much, but perhaps it will last until mother is well again. I don't know what the Doctor's bill will be; it must be something. I can't take a favor from him." She blushed, though she knew no eye could see her, and putting her hands up to hide her face from herself she went on, "I have nearly everything in the house that I need this month, except a few little things for Christmas, while Laura needs a sacque and new shoes. I can't give lessons any more until mother is well. Let me see—they all owe me for last week's lessons, fifteen dollars; that is all I shall get in this month, unless Dr. Stanhope gets back and pays me that old account. I don't suppose I shall be able to start my class again until after New Year. Well, I am afraid my Christmas will be but a poor one, but if mother is up and well it will be a thankful one. Now who is it at the door this miserable afternoon?" She pushed her book and purse back into the drawer and went out, not even stopping before the mirror to see how she looked. Her smooth, waving hair was never out of order; her tea-rose complexion needed no toilet addition; the white teeth and sweet wide mouth were always perfect. Her dress was the same dark calico she had worn on Saturday, and the neat collar and cuffs had been arranged when she dressed after her housework was finished at dinner. Before she reached the front door she could see through the window

that her visitor was none other than Dr. Conway. He was divesting himself of his waterproof, and shaking the rain-drops from his broad "sombrera," which he used when riding in the sun and rain. He saw her in the parlor and opened the door for himself. Though not nearly so well dressed as yesterday, he was looking much better. His grand beard was bedewed with moisture, and curling; his rough grey suit was becoming to his massive form; and his kingly eyes were full of feeling. Few persons could have resisted the magnetism of his presence when he chose to be agreeable, and this afternoon he had a good will to please. Taking Mary's hand in his soft palm, he held it just a trifle closer and an instant longer than was essential for mere greeting, releasing it before she could find it convenient to withdraw it from motives of modesty. His touch was magnetic, and his eyes told silent admiration as he looked at her.

"How is our mother this afternoon?"

Whether the pronoun had been of choice or accident, it would have needed an acute observer to decide; but the doubt was sufficient to deepen the girl's color as she answered, "She is resting; I will see if she is awake." Returning in a moment, she continued: "Unfortunately, she is sleeping again. As you do not allow her disturbed, will you be seated and wait?"

"If you have leisure to sit with me."

"I have nothing else to do."

"Oh, golden hour!"

But now he did not seem to know how to garner the treasure, for he was silent, and when he did speak it was only to say,

"Mrs. Vaughn asked me this morning if you would go on with your music class this week; she says she will send Clarence here if you wish."

"She is very kind. I cannot go out to teach any more until mother is quite well; she is nervous, and does not like to have me out of her sight."

"I don't wonder!" interrupted the Doctor, emphasizing with his eyes.

Mary's glance fell, but she continued, "If Mrs. Vaughn will let Clarence come here to take his lessons, I shall be very glad, for I need to work every day."

"How long before you consent to give me leave to work for you, Mary?" His deep voice was low and insinuating, and his heart shone out in his face.

Dr. Conway had come here this day intending simply to "keep a hold on Mary," and to avoid bringing matters to any inconvenient issue; but his heart gained mastery over his prudence; his hand even trembled as he took possession of hers again, looking down into her lovely eyes. She was sitting at the end of the lounge which had been brought in for the use of her mother; his chair was very near, and Mary felt that at that proximity her will was ruled by his magnetic power. She took away her hand, and rising stood on the rug before she answered with downcast eye and bated breath.

"Dr. Conway, of course I cannot misunderstand your meaning. I thank you for the honor you do me, but I must repeat the request that you do not talk to me about this until mother is well again." Knowing her mother's feelings about him, she began to feel that it was a criminal breach of duty for them to even talk of love until her consent had been gained. Mary intended henceforth to be very prudent, and to conceal her own sentiments sedulously.

"Do you think, Miss Mary, that your mother would disapprove of your hearing my secret? Have you asked her if you may?"

She blushed at the duplicity of her words as she answered, "I cannot have mother troubled while she is sick."

"Do you think this will trouble her? will she be unwilling you should love me?" The cadence of his voice was irresistible.

Poor Mary was getting embarrassed, and was half ready to cry. She spoke hastily, "Any subject would give her trouble which would force her to think or disturb her nerves now. You must wait, Dr. Conway, or—"

"I am willing to wait as long as you can ask for *definite arrangements;* but I do think, Miss Mary, you might give me a little light and hope; you might tell me how *you* feel about it. You are so quiet and calm I can read nothing of your heart; but I don't believe you would suffer me to go on loving you and hoping, if you intended only to disappoint me at last." He knew he was throwing a steel chain of obligations about himself as well as her by this appeal, but she was so beautiful as she stood before him that his heart went out to her entirely, and he was desperate; he rose, too, and stood at her side, leaning his arm on the mantel and bending his handsome head forward so that his beard almost touched her cheek. Mary turned pale, and dared not look up, for her heart was beating like a prisoned bird, and her slender fingers trembled so that she clasped them together to steady them; but her voice was clear and steady when she answered,

"Doctor, I think it is hardly fair to appeal to me in that way. You *promised* to wait. If I were to tell you what you ask, there would be nothing left for a prudent woman to tell." The tears had come at last, for she felt that he had compromised her modesty in beguiling her into a betrayal of feeling, and she was wounded with him.

"Have I offended you, Miss Mary? Pray, forgive me; but

it is right hard," and he moved further from her. She was seized with the impulse to put out her hand and yield all on the spot, but looking up to his half-averted eyes she caught a gleam from another part of his nature.

The Doctor's prudence had returned. He was satisfied now that he had won her heart, and that she was only standing off on her dignity until her mother's consent should leave her free to confess her love. He began to fear he had been precipitate in thus urging her, and leaving so little room to "draw off" in case it should seem advisable. He resolved to remove himself to a safe distance both in sentiment and person, for it was impossible to stand quite near this woman and control his heart. A perception of some of these things flashed on her consciousness, and all of a sudden she felt herself repelled from him who a moment before had drawn out her heart with an almost irresistible power. She was perfectly calm in an instant, and her voice had a ring of indignation in it as she said,

"I do not wish to be hard, Dr. Conway. Please remember I hold no claim over you." The words sounded unfeeling, and would have been unpardonably so, if it had not been for the silent scene which had passed.

The Doctor bowed his head sadly, perfectly satisfied with their relative positions, but wishing to leave Mary with a little hurting in her conscience.

Just then Laura came in with wood for the fire, and informed Mary that her mother wanted her. As she went out, Laura kneeled down to put on the wood, giving the Doctor a sidelong glance which was not friendly. He recognized her and held out his hand, but she struck it sharply with her own, and hastily left the room as Mary returned to say that her mother would see the Doctor.

CHAPTER XI.

BUCK McQUILLAN.

LATE in the afternoon a fierce wind from the north came to assist the sullen rain in making nature miserable. It tore and yelled and lashed until the dripping foliage was transformed into shivering skeletons. Sleet stung you in the face, and each breath of wind was like a two-edged dagger, so penetratingly did it dig for your backbone. All under foot was soon a freezing slush. Men hurried through outside business, and came home to pile on the post-oak wood. Housekeepers donned extra sacques and shawls, and bustled about to close up evening work that they might come to crouch over the fire. The change is so sudden the flesh refuses to be reconciled to it on the instant. After heavier garments are put on, and roaring fires are built, the various members of a family feel that comfort in its perfection is to be attained only by the social sharing of the same hearthstone. There is one good in the fresh norther of Texas; it arouses in the ease-loving people an enthusiasm akin to that which a snowstorm brings to the youth of New England homes. For a time regular work, unless it be of a pressing nature, is suspended, and all meet to shiver in company, and condole over the "terrible norther," while in their hearts is exhilaration and new life astir.

So it was that Bob Dean found Mrs. Brown's little family when he reached home at half-past five on this Monday afternoon. As he slammed the hall-door (you know he was Southern born and raised, and the wind was very high), Mrs. Brown came out from the family room opposite the parlor and called to him:

"Come in here, Mr. Dean; we have a good fire. I had one made in your room, but it is not good hot yet. Isn't this terrible? Don't go up-stairs to take off your overcoat; let me help you. There! I'll just hang it on the rack here. Never mind the mud; it won't matter. We are all in here."

Bob found Dr. Conway comfortably smoking his pipe on one side of the fireplace, while Jennie sat opposite with a piece of fancy-work in her pretty hands, and a rich bright shawl drawn around her shoulders. Mrs. Brown set a chair for Bob in front, and exhibited a motherly solicitude in having him dry his feet, telling him again "not to mind the mud —it will sweep up." She placed her own rocking-chair by his side, and, getting her knitting, kept time to the click of the polished needles with her merry, pleasant chat. Bob had not seen much of her before in the home-social point of view. At table, her whole soul was concentrated upon the exacting thought that the coffee be just of the proper strength, the cakes as hot as possible, that Mat be kept out of the kitchen and where she was wanted, and that hot biscuit be duly handed round. But she was different this evening, and her kindness brought up to Bob's mind his mother and the letter he had received to-day. He took it from his pocket, and handed her one sheet, which contained a kindly message to herself. It ran thus:—

"Tell Mrs. Brown I thank her for making you so comfortable, and, if it is not too much trouble, will she please scold you if you go with damp feet after your day's work is done. You know, my boy, you were never half careful enough about yourself. Remember, if you should contract your father's disease my heart would break."

Mrs. Brown's eyes were dim when she handed back his letter. Down in her heart was a dear picture of her own

curly-headed boy, who she had dreamed long ago would be the pride of her age, as this young man was to his mother, but he had been buried out of her sight ten hungry years. Bob's quick eyes were gathering something of this from her face, for they were moist in sympathy, as he said,

"You must be endowed with second sight, Mrs. Brown, to have divined that message while it was yet in my pocket. I am ready for my scolding."

"Oh, I shall save that until you are disobedient; but you may look out."

"These naughty big feet of mine have given mother much trouble," said Bob, while his mouth and eyes were tender with old memories; "my first recollection of her is having her pull off my shoes and rub my feet warm after being out at play. Can't I trade them off to you, Miss Jennie, for hearth-ornaments, they are so ornamental?" and he laughed as he took a comprehensive view of them, bespattered with mud and steaming before the fire. Jennie laid her head on one side and considered them too in the light of speculation.

"I am afraid they would be like mamma's wardrobe—I should have to build a house to put them in," she answered, saucily.

"Well," responded Bob, "you might make your house just a little larger, and it would hold me, too."

"Quite a convenient arrangement!" put in Dr. Conway, looking up from his paper. Jennie blushed and laughed.

"And if you should want to go into the leather trade," continued Bob, "they would be a splendid investment; you would be assured of enough home consumption to keep business lively."

"Let's change the subject," cried Jennie. "Mr. Dean, when are you going to see your mother?"

"I hope to visit her Christmas holidays, if I keep the use of my feet."

"Otherwise, *I* will see that you are transported," added the Doctor.

"Want to get rid of me? Please don't send me to Botany Bay."

"Why don't you have your mother come to see you?" asked Mrs. Brown. "We would be glad to have her come and spend Christmas here."

"Oh, do, Mr. Dean!" exclaimed Jennie. "We can't spare you. We want to have a Sunday-school tree, and you must stay to help us."

"My hands as well as my feet are at your service, Miss Jennie; but *may* I bring her here, Mrs. Brown? I would be so glad to, and she would like it so much!" His face looked boyish in his pleasure as he turned it to her.

"May you? Why certainly; we would be delighted!" answered Mrs. Brown, cordially.

"Thank you; I shall write to ask her immediately. You know, madam, we have no home now; there is nothing home-like in a boarding-school. We did not anticipate any pleasure except in being together. You are very kind."

"Oh, not at all. Where is she now, Mr. Dean?"

"She is teaching music in a school in Austin. We grieve to be apart in our work, but it must be for a time." His eyes were very wistful, but they gathered a new light as he added, "I know she will enjoy being here and getting acquainted with you all and my surroundings. She is so foolish as to think a great deal of my unworthy self." His thoughts ran hastily to wondering what she would think of Mary Lipscomb. Turning to the Doctor, he asked abruptly, "How is Mrs. Lipscomb doing?"

"Very well," answered that gentleman, any further speech being cut short by curiosity of what Jennie was so amused about. She had glanced significantly at Bob when he put his question, and he, finding his train of thought detected, only slowly bowed his head and half closed his eyes, while a kept-back smile drew down the corners of his wide mouth.

"What amuses you, Miss Jennie?" asked the Doctor.

"Amuses me! I am not amused, but annoyed; my thread is in a knot," and she pulled savagely at her tatting-work and frowned over it. It was now the Doctor's turn to be annoyed. He said nothing, but leaned back in his chair, took up his paper, and became too deeply interested to take any further notice of the conversation.

"Jennie," said Mrs. Brown, "suppose we have tea in here to-night; it will be uncomfortable in the dining-room."

"Well, mamma; shall I tell Aunt 'Cindy?"

"She is not here; tell Mat."

As Jennie reached the door she got a view of the Doctor's face. He was not reading, but was frowning and winking his eyes hard—showing his temper. She went out, and laughed slyly as she snapped her fingers, saying, "Goody! he does feel it, too—goody! I'll make him feel it more yet. Conceited things these men are!" and she hugged up her arms tight as if to give herself a commendatory embrace. When she came back she brought the coffee-pot and dripper, Mat following with the tea-kettle.

"I thought you would rather drip the coffee here, mamma," she said, putting the things down on the hearth.

The Browns never used any other beverage but coffee unless there was company, although Mrs. Brown was accustomed to call her evening meal tea. Dr. Conway was fond of tea, but affected coffee instead lest he be considered effeminate or

"Yankee." He had understood upon first arriving in the State that the milder effusion was used principally by ladies, children, and Northern people, while the love of black coffee was the test of a naturalized Texan. He was determined to leave nothing undone which would add to his popularity.

Bob moved aside to give room for the table, which Mat now brought forward. The good things followed in quick succession, and they were seated around the board when Jennie remarked,

"I wish papa had n't gone back to the mill last night; it is *so* disagreeable."

"Oh, he don't mind; he never cares for anything as long as he has plenty of work at the mill."

Bob wondered how he could content himself away from the comforts of so pleasant a home. He inwardly resolved that if ever he had a home he would stay there at least half the time. Poor Bob! such thoughts were fraught with sadness, for now there was no idea of home for him without Mary, and all thoughts of her were sad in very despondency.

They were still sitting around the table eating apples when there came a hasty rap at the door. Mat went out and returned, saying,

"Thar 's a man wants you, Dr. Conway."

"Of course, as it is cold as blixins and I am comfortable! What did I tell you, Dean? Drop the profession, man, before you get in any further. Do you know who it is, Mat?"

"Yes, sir; it 's Mr. Buck McQuillan."

"Tell him to come to the fire, Mat," said Mrs. Brown.

When the man followed her in, he stood a moment in the door shading his eyes with his hand, dazzled with the warmth and light and shining array of comfort; then he took off his wide-brimmed hat and came slowly in, as if afraid of touching something with his wet clothes.

"Good-evening, Mr. Mac," said the Doctor, shaking hands with him; "pretty rough weather!"

"Miserble!" the man answered.

"All well at home?"

"All up un about. Pap, he's been sorter under the weather, but he's gittin' peerter now."

"It is not for any of your family I am wanted, then?"

"No, sir; it's fur ole Miss Vinson."

"Mrs. Vinson! why, what is the matter there again?"

"Well, she was took 'bout a hour ago with some kinder spell, and she's been layin' dead-like ever sence; and Miss Polly Vinson's little boy he run over to our house after maw fur to come and see her, an' he was ter come on after you. He said Aggie was a-cryin' "—his voice choked as he said it —"an' I tole him to go home outen th' cold, he is sech a little chunk of a feller, an' I'd fetch you." The messenger rubbed his lips with the back of his red hand, cleared his throat, and turned his wet feet nearer the fire.

"Well, I will be ready in a moment," said Dr. Conway, rising and going up to his room.

"Won't you have some supper, sir?" said Mrs. Brown, her hospitable heart ever ready to suggest comfort.

"'Bleeged to ye, ma'am, but I've et my supper," and he cleared his throat again and hunched his chair.

"You might take a cup of hot coffee, though; 'twould do you good after being out in the cold. Mat, set the coffee on some coals."

"Thousan' times 'bleeged, ma'am, but I don't keer fur eny, if you please;" another hunch of the chair.

"Is the deaf girl a sister to the other—Agnes I believe is her name?" Bob asked of nobody in particular. No answer immediately. Finally Mrs. Brown said,

"Yes; I think she is. I don't know much about the family; they used to take washing sometimes from my boarders, and I have seen the girls. Laura, the mute, lives with Mrs. Lipscomb."

"Ah!" and Bob relapsed into silence. Then Jennie asked,

"Do you know everybody, Mr. Dean? How in the world did you know there was a deaf girl in the family?"

"I stopped at her home while out walking yesterday to inquire about the road." Bob's words were short, and he was grave.

The stranger's eyes moved from one to the other of the speakers in succession, and his face was full of alertness, but he kept silence. Dr. Conway now entered ready to ride.

"We will go round by the stable for my horses, Mr. Mac. Good-evening, friends!"

Mrs. Brown called after them—"Mr. McQuillan, tell the family if they need any help in nursing to send me word."

"Ma'am!—oh, yes'm; thankee, mum," and they were shut out in the dark.

"A fearful night to be out in," said Mrs. Brown.

"Yes," answered Bob.

"But sickness makes no choice of weather," and the little woman shook her head, moralizing.

"How the Doctor must suffer!" said Jennie, softly.

"He is not the only sufferer," Bob responded with fierceness.

"No; there's the sick woman," Jennie assented.

"Yes."

"And Mr. McQuillan."

"Yes."

Jennie wondered what was the matter with Bob, he had grown so grave and hard.

CHAPTER XII.

"I DON'T WANT YOU TO TOUCH ME!"

IT was still sleeting and freezing as McQuillan and Dr. Conway rode off from the stable-yard. The darkness was impenetrable, not even lit by an occasional gleam of lightning. They could only let the horses' instinct be their guide, contenting themselves with holding a tight rein to keep the animals from slipping on the icy road. After a protracted silence the Doctor spoke.

"Have you been long in this settlement, Mr. McQuillan?"

"'Bout a year. Pap he bought sixty acres off'n Parson Jeeme's track las' Jinewary, an' we been livin' on it sence March."

"Got it nearly all in?"

"Not yit. Had twenty acres in corn and 'bout ten in cotton. 'Spect to git it all in next year ef we live an' nothin' happens."

"Are you much acquainted with Mrs. Vinson's family?"

"Well, putty good, I reckin; some of 'em are over ter o'r 'ouse every Sunday onless we's over thar; 'taint mor'n a quarter straight through."

"Clever family!" said the Doctor, cautiously.

"Yes; you better b'lieve it is. I go high on Miss Aggie!" and the fellow gave an embarrassed laugh.

"So? Should n't wonder; nice looking girl."

"She is *that*."

The men could not see each other's faces; perhaps it was as well.

"Go in, Doctor," said McQuillan, when they reached the

fence. "I'll fasten your horse round in the shed outen the weather. Have him fed?"

"No, thank you. Don't take off the saddle. I will go back pretty soon, if I can get off."

"Don't b'lieve you'd oughter," muttered the man, as he led away the muddy horses.

The Doctor found the old woman still insensible; the attack was paralytic, and there was little he could do. Agnes was sitting on the side of her grandmother's bed chafing the cold hands. She had been weeping, and her ox-like eyes looked more sullen than ever; still, her sallow cheeks were flushed, and grief had given expression to her stolid face.

Dr. Conway approached the bed and examined the patient's pulse, then offered his hand to Agnes in silence. She took it, bursting into tears anew, then arose and cowered down on a box at the foot of the bed. Mrs. McQuillan and the widowed daughter-in-law sat by the hearth. Having exhausted all their simple remedies, they were beguiling the time in which they must needs wait for the doctor by dipping snuff, and giving each other their experiences of like attacks, which they had either witnessed themselves or heard tell of.

When McQuillan came in he went first to look at the still figure on the bed, then shaking his head he gave vent to an emphatic "umph," and came to the fire.

"Set down, Buck; ain't yer mighty cold and wet?" said his mother.

"Putty cold, but not much wet; 'tain't rainin' now."

"Awful weather!" suggested Polly, the widow.

"Turrible!" said Buck, glancing over to where Agnes sat, with her face buried in the bed-clothes.

"Have a cheer and warm yourself."

He took the old chair she offered him, which, to use a com-

mon expression, had seen better days as to legs and paint, but was still doing good service with its original bottom of cow-hide. He drew it quite on to the hearth, extending his chilled hands over the blaze and smoke. The fireplace was immensely wide, with huge throat gaping and black. To one unaccustomed to these log-chimneys, they are unpleasantly suggestive of a monster with wide-open, hungry mouth. For irons, two rough stones did duty. The principal log on the fire was too long, and one end was left on the hearth, thereby furnishing a connecting line for the puffs of strong smoke to escape into the room—no danger of being suffocated by it though, for there was abundant means of egress through the numerous "chinks" in the wall and roof. The hearth was, furthermore, adorned by a well-smoked coffee boiler and an oven, in which the women by turns looked, generally adding coals to the embers on top after each view. Buck untied the handkerchief he had knotted around his neck and held it before the fire to dry. The Doctor left the bedside and came to the fire, shivering, though his overcoat was heavy and fur-collared.

"What do you think of her, Doctor?" asked Polly.

"It is a stroke of paralysis, madam. There is not much we can do for her. It may not last long, and again she may not get over it at all."

Here Agnes gave way to sobbing again. The group at the fire sat in silence. Buck cleared his throat, turned uneasily in his chair, shuffled his feet, wiped his eyes, and could stand it no longer. Going up to her, he put his hand on her shoulder, saying,

"Don't cry that-a-way, Aggie; don't. You will hurt yourse'f."

Increased sobbing, while she turned so as to draw her shoulder from under his hand.

"Now don't, Aggie; maybe she will git well; I would n't take on so."

Sobs louder. Poor Buck was beside himself.

"Oh, honey, you will break my heart!" and he threw both arms around her.

"Go 'way!" she cried out; "I don't want you to touch me!" and she sprang up and ran into the shed-room, adjoining.

Buck returned to the fire, but stood so none could see his face. The man's muscular frame was shaking with emotion.

"Don't mind her now, Buck; she don't hardly know what she 's a-sayin'," said Polly, exchanging glances with his mother.

"Tell you it 's putty hard lines fur me to see her in sich distress and can't do nothin' fur her, and to hyar her say she don't want me to tech her."

"Oh, well; don't mind. She 'll git better terreckly; them what cries most gits over ther trouble easiest," said his mother.

"She ought not to stay in that room away from the fire," said Dr. Conway. He had been very still, but there was an intense look in his deep-set eyes.

"'Spect I better go home, maw; I thought you women folks might need me to-night or I would n't a come; I wush I had n't now. I 'll bring in more wood fust."

He stayed out a long time, but when he came he had a large armful of wood, which he put in the corner; then he refilled the bucket which stood on a shelf in the same corner; then approached the fire, taking care to pass near enough to look into the door through which Agnes had retreated.

"Drink some hot coffee before you go, Buck. Aunt Sally, is the potatoes done?"

Buck's mother thrust the poker through the eye of the oven-lid and lifted it off; then, with her apron for a napkin, she felt of the steaming contents.

"They ain't real saft yit," and she replaced the cover and renewed the embers. Polly handed Buck a cup of weak coffee, saying,

"I don't see 's yer need go home, nohow." He was drinking his coffee in gulps, smoking hot, but when he finished he returned her the cup and said,

"Well, I don't know; seems like mebbe Aggie would ruther I was away. Looks hard, too, that she'd want *me* to go."

"You should have let her alone then," said Dr. Conway sternly.

"Should! Well I don't know who 's got a right to try to comfort her if I have n't—the man what she 's a-goin' to marry a Christmas! Mebbe you think you could do it better yourself! I would n't advise yer to try; that 's all I 've got to say." The man's eyes were on fire, and his whole frame dilated with passion as he turned on Dr. Conway, who had been sitting handsome and cold by his side—no longer cold now; the information Buck had given him in his last sentence took him by surprise. Buck's mother rose hastily, and, coming between them, laid her hand on the arm of her angry son, saying,

"Oh, now, Buck, do hush; what 's the sense of makin' a fuss. You hain't yourse'f to-night; you *hed* better go home. The Doctor did n't mean nothin'."

"Perhaps I owe Mr. McQuillan an apology," sneered that gentleman; "I did not know he occupied so important a relationship to the family."

Buck looked suspiciously at him, in doubt whether he was being ridiculed by the fine gentleman at his side, or whether the said gentleman only intended to make honorable amends for a natural mistake. His generous heart took the most charitable view, but in his embarrassment he knew not how to accept the proffered apology; he twisted his old hat around in

his shaking hands, and shuffled from one foot to the other, and finally,

"Well, it 's all right, then. I s'pose I ought n't to flew up so; but I 'm awful techous about her. Good-night all. Maw, I will bring the mar' over fer ye early." He closed the door on the group, who sat in silence after the "crush, crush" of his heavy footsteps died out of hearing. Neither of the women spoke; they felt that the Doctor had trespassed beyond his liberty as a physician, and that Buck had been wronged in being made to appear at a disadvantage. This class of people are clannish, and suspicion any who by manner or word show a cultivation beyond themselves.

The Doctor felt that he had lost prestige, and was intensely annoyed; for his present popularity lay so near his heart that anything which threatened its hold, even among these people, became a matter of moment to him.

After awhile Agnes came back, and, taking the chair Buck had vacated, crouched down with her face in her hands, the picture of shivering misery. Still, nothing was said; all felt doubtful of their ground.

Polly went to the bed and looked at and felt the sick woman; then the Doctor followed, examined his patient again, gave some medicines and directions to the widow, and began putting on his water-proof, preparatory to starting. Poor Agnes now turned towards him with the pleading look of a dumb animal in her great eyes. He must have seen there was more trouble in her face than mere grief for her aged grandmother, but he did not speak to her. Saying merely, "I will call again to-morrow; good-night," he closed the door behind him, shutting out from his sight the misery he was leaving—that deepest of all misery, a woman's heart breaking because men are thoughtless and love themselves.

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE STARTLING REVELATIONS.

A WEEK has passed by. The weather is still cold, and the genial warmth of Mrs. Brown's breakfast-room is enticing. There is a busy clatter of knives and forks and cups and spoons, with much lively, pleasant talk. The family are all present excepting Dr. Conway, and before Mr. Brown finishes his second cup of coffee he enters. The Doctor is not usually unpunctual; that would not be popular in a professional man.

"Good-morning, Doctor," said Mrs. Brown. "Have your seat. We are all waiting, you see, on ourselves. Mat, bring hot biscuit. I heard some one call for you last night—a new patient?"

"No, madam; it was for Mrs. Vinson again; they will not believe I can do nothing for her." The Doctor's manner was surly, as if the subject were a painful one.

"Is she no better yet?"

"Never will be in this world. She can't live through the day. I shall have to go back there this morning, I suppose, though it is of no use."

"Dear me! Jennie, I must go out to see them. Mr. Brown, are you going to ride Button?"

"Not if you want him. Can ride something else. Got to go back to the mill this mornin'."

It is well into the forenoon before Mrs. Brown returns from her errand of mercy. After looking to dinner, she goes upstairs to find her daughter. Jennie is shut in her own room, where a bright fire is burning on the hearth. Half buried in

the cushions of her rocking-chair, she is deep into the interests of a new novel which her father brought from Rockdale, and which she had commenced the previous evening, when there was no one to talk to. Her room, though intensely comfortable, was characteristic of the selfish, idle girl—handsome furniture, luxurious chairs, large mirror, with every other appurtenance of ease about; yet there was none of the delicate neatness of order which Mary Lipscomb's rooms exhibited. A rich crimson shawl clung around her plump shoulders. One little foot encased in a boot whose dimensions would have made Cinderella jealous; its mate had been kicked off because it pinched. Her short, jetty curls were clustered close to the smooth forehead; the full lips red and childish; and the whole attitude careless, pleasurable, and charming. Well might Dr. Conway say she was sweet enough for anybody.

"You in here, Jennie?"

Mrs. Brown closed the door softly and took a low chair by the fire. Jennie did not think of offering her rocking-chair, she was so used to having the best things for herself.

"How is Mrs. Vinson, mamma?" Jennie asked, without looking up from her book.

"She is dead, Jennie. I want to tell you something I found out there this morning." Mrs. Brown's lips are tight set as she lays her hand impressively on her daughter's lap.

"What, mamma?" Jennie puts her book down on her knee, keeping a finger between the leaves as if she did not mean to be long interrupted.

"Well, listen. La me, this world! What a world, and what a sight of misery there is in it! When I got out yonder—you know I went with the Doctor—the family were all gathered around the old woman's bed. None of the neighbors had got in—a mercy, too, for they do crowd so when

anybody dies. Directly Mrs. McQuillan and Buck and his sister came. The old woman was conscious, and as soon as she saw Buck she signed for him to come close. There was a sight of beckoning and whispering among them all, and by-and-by Mrs. McQuillan came up to Agnes, who was standing by me at the foot of the bed, and told her that her grandmother wanted her and Buck to be *married* before she died. It seems they were to have been married at Christmas, but the old woman had taken a notion to see it done before she left them. She kept muttering 'she needs protection.' Buck looked straight at Agnes, but said nothing. She was as blue as skimmed milk, but instead of answering she just turned and *looked over at Dr. Conway*, who was on the other side of her; such a look I have seen an animal give just before it died. *I* felt all-overish. He never raised his eyes from the floor; but I know he must have felt it, for he turned white too. Polly Vinson spoke up, 'I think you had better do it, Aggie; it will give ma satisfaction on her deathbed.' Still she did n't open her mouth; but I could see in her face that she meant to die first before she would yield. Then Buck's mother said, 'Buck can ride to town in a little while to get the license, and come by and get Parson Thompson; he stayed last night at Mrs. Vaughn's, and that 's right on the road.' Buck now came 'round to her and took her by the hand, which was hanging limp by her side, and said, 'May I, Aggie? It won't be but a few weeks sooner, honey, and you know I 'm most distracted 'bout your trouble.' Just then the Doctor turned to go out, and, would you think it, she just whirled around, crying, 'No, no! I won't, I can't! Oh, you all don't know! Oh, Doctor, save me!' and she flung herself right into his arms. 'Hush, girl; you don't know what you are saying!' and he just let her down on the floor. 'Yes I do know, but I can't

help it! You know you said you loved me and would take care of me, and I won't marry Buck!' and the poor thing fainted dead away. 'Fool!' the Doctor said, and stepped 'round her, and, going out, got on his horse and rode off. I had seen and heard enough, and wanted to go too, but I would n't have forced my company on him then for the world. When they got the girl on the bed and put water on her face, she came to, and started up wild-like, and then she seemed to remember all; she shivered and muttered, 'I have ruined us all, and *him* too;' then she moaned, and turning her face to the wall put her apron over her face and lay like she was dead. Buck had stood all the while like one in a dream; now he put his hat on with both hands and went out; I don't want to see anybody's face look like his ever again. Some one called out that the old woman was dead; it was true. I wonder if she understood it all."

"Mamma, *do you* believe he deceived the poor girl?"

"Believe! there is no believing about it; of course he did. He made love to her in his careless, easy way, never stopping to think the creature would be fool enough to expect anything to come of it. He did not dream the consequences would find him out so soon, and he had no time to prevent. He is just the kind of man to do it. Don't doubt he talks love to every girl he can get to listen to him. Still, the mischief is done, all the same. She might have married Buck, who is a heap too good for her, if Dr. Conway had n't put nonsense into her head; and the poor fool has made it so public, scandal is bound to come of it. He did very wrong, *very wrong.*"

Jennie has been rocking violently while her mother speaks, with pearly teeth pressed into rosy lip, dilated eyes, and hands clasped over her throbbing heart. She can keep it back no longer.

"I don't care if he did! It was her own fault! I know she threw herself at him! I won't give him up! I won't! I won't! Nobody shall take him from me! Oh, mamma! mamma! what shall I do?" and she fell into her mother's arms in a torrent of tears.

"Why, Jennie, my child! I did n't know! Of course I did n't know, yet I suspected, too; but they all love you and you treat them all alike—how could I know? Poor child! my pet child! Try not to think of him any more; he is not worthy of you, Precious."

"Oh, I don't care, mamma! I love him, and I must have him—I *will* have him! He is no worse than other men, and I love him! I love him so!"

"Does he know, Jennie? Are you engaged?"

"Of course not, mamma! I won't let him know. He makes love to me every time he has a chance, but I throw him off because he courts all the other girls too. He loves Mary Lipscomb better than he loves me, now, but I don't believe she would marry him; I don't intend she shall. Oh, mamma! it would kill me if she should!" and she lay a perfect tempest of tears in her mother's bosom, while that mother's heart was aching for her, and the mother's brain busy with planning for her. She had never refused her anything in her life that she cried for, and never had she wept like this before. What should she do to stop the tears? She could not bear to see her cry; her precious, only child, her baby—something must be done to comfort her or she certainly would make herself sick. She should do as she pleased—so she should, and trust to luck to bring it all right in the future. It did not matter so much whom a girl married anyway, so she *managed* him afterwards; and if Jennie could n't manage Dr. Conway, why, *she could.* Raising the wet face up to her own, she kissed it,

and said in the cooing tone a mother would use to soothe a grieved child,

"Get up, darling, and dry your pretty eyes, and we will talk about it. If you love him so, you shall have him. *We* will manage. I believe he is well meaning, after all, and, as you say, no worse than other men. Now, listen. He will speak to me of what I saw out yonder, and I will treat the whole matter as of not the least consequence—that the girl is a simpleton to have viewed common politeness from a gentleman as the attentions of a lover. He will agree that this is all so, but at the same time he would prefer that I should not mention it to any one. Of course, I would n't think of such a thing, and he will be under obligation to me, and afraid to displease me, and so forth; *but I will take care that Mary Lipscomb and her mother hear of it.* Mary is not like you;" —she pressed her child to her heart to take the pain out of the words—"it will make all the difference in the world to her; it will be all over with him there. He will come to us for comfort, and we will comfort him. He is a nice man anyway, and I always liked him. We will take care that he does not get into any more scrapes of this kind."

Jennie sits up now, and looks at the fire. The tears have ceased, but her voice is very piteous as she says,

"If Mary loves him, and I think she does *some*, I shall be very sorry for her, but I can't help it; I can't give him up."

As might have been expected, dinner that day was rather an embarrassing affair. Jennie was glad Bob Dean was not present. On school-days he was accustomed to take a lunch-basket, like the boys, and took dinner with them, thus making sure they were out of mischief. Mrs. Brown was very busy about her carving, and was altogether non-committal. Jennie was unusually chatty, entertaining the Doctor with

sketches from the book she was reading; she knew he did not hear one thing in five that she said, and was watching her mother with furtive eyes all the while; but it suited her as well to-day, so long as unpleasant silence was avoided. Again she thanked her lucky stars that Bob was away; "for I could n't have fooled him; those gray eyes of his see everything." Dinner over, she escaped to her own room, saying,

"Sorry to leave you so abruptly, but really I am crazy to finish my book."

But when she reached her room she took no notice of her book, which lay open, face downward, on the floor; instead, she went and leaned on the table in front of the long mirror, and looked into the reflection of her own black eyes, which now had little dark circles under them, brought there by her morning's tears. Looked on, but saw nothing; for her little hands were pressed tightly over her aching heart, and she was listening with all her soul to the sound of the Doctor's footsteps going into her mother's room below. When he rose from the table, he had said,

"Mrs. Brown, I would like a few moments' conversation with you when you are at leisure."

"All right, Doctor. Go into my room, and I will come in as soon as I lock up my safe and closet doors."

"It will all come out right yet," she added to herself as he went out, but there was a tug at her heart-strings, for this work she had undertaken for her only child went against her better feelings. An hour afterwards she went up to Jennie's room, and said,

"It 's all right, dear; he is satisfied that I don't think him much to blame, and he thinks it very generous in me to exculpate him as I do; so many would have viewed it differently; but he does not want you to know anything about it;

so remember, you are in total ignorance. I am going out to the funeral to take notes, and see if anything has got out. I think the family will try to keep it quiet, and get her to marry Buck yet, if he will have her—just what she ought to do. What business has the like of her got to be thinking of Dr. Conway."

Mrs. Vinson's funeral took place next morning. About ten o'clock groups of neighbors gathered at the church-house; then the plain coffin containing the remains of the deceased arrived in a two-horse wagon, followed by a second, bearing the afflicted family. At the tolling of the bell, all proceeded to the burying-ground in the edge of the village. There were but few equipages out, for it was morning and week-day; the intimate friends of the family were, like themselves, poor and humble; and all others had something else to do. Had it been Sunday, or even afternoon, the attendance had been more notable, both as to style and number. Some of our friends are here—Mrs. Brown for one. We know her object. Mary Lipscomb, too. She has come to meet Laura and take her home. Her kind heart goes out tenderly to the afflicted girl. Mrs. Lipscomb has so far recovered as to be able to go about the house, and no longer needs her daughter's constant care. A casual observer might take Mary to be one of the mourners, for her gentle face gives token of the sympathy she entertains for these distressed people, or I should say the distressed person, for Laura alone gives evidence of any acute grief. Agnes has stayed at home, and the widow is too used to trouble to "take on much." She, however, is clad in "rusty" black, and makes frequent use of a very stiff and very dingy handkerchief, which she leaves folded in a small square, contenting herself with the use of the corners. Her boys show an unaccustomed profusion of starched collars and badly blackened

shoes. Dr. Conway is here, too; why, I am not prepared to say. Mrs. Brown thought that if she had been in his place she would have stayed away. He did not mingle with the crowd around the open grave, but stood at a little distance on an elevated knoll under a spreading oak, as if for military resistance. There he stood and pulled his beard, and watched the group below. Not far from him was Buck McQuillan, also standing a little apart, with his wide hat hiding his eyes, and his handkerchief knotted around his neck. He had added to his toilet, out of respect to the occasion, a pair of long buckskin gauntlets, and "store" boots, with high heels and red tops, stamped with the ubiquitous, five-pointed Texas star. It is needless to say that these brilliant tops were outside his pantaloons, and that they were furthermore adorned with Mexican spurs. But Buck was not observing the crowd half as much as he observed Dr. Conway. And now the minister is reading the Methodist burial-service. A few sepulchral voices sing a dolorous hymn. All heads bow in brief prayer. The remains are lowered to their last resting-place, and the rattling clods sound their requiem. One by one, then in knots of twos and threes, the assembly disperses. Dr. Conway was about to quit his post of observation when Buck accosted him:

"Dr. Conway, I'd like a few words with you."

"Yes?" said the Doctor, the color rising quickly to his brow. "What can I do for you, Mr. McQuillan?"

"'Tain't wuth while fur any misters to pass betwixt us, Doctor; we've got to have a settle*ment*."

"I do not know that you owe me anything, sir, unless you propose to assume the payment of Mrs. Vinson's bill," said the Doctor, pretending to construe the man's words literally.

"Now look a yere, Dr. Conway, yer need n't er let on 's ef

yer don't know what I mean. Ef I don't owe you nothin' you owe me right smart, and I 'm a-goin' ter have satisfaction outen yer, too. Ef yer don't show no white feather, but 'll come up and meet me like a man, it will be a fair fight; but ef yer begin to sneak outen it, an' 'pear like you can't understan' plain talk, why I 'll jist take my satisfaction whenever I gits ready. Now ye 've heerd what I 's got to say, what do *you* say?"

"I have to say that you had better attend to your own concerns, sir, and that it is hardly a safe thing to threaten a man publicly at this day, and in the present status of our laws."

"So? You got a right smart to say, an' in er mighty few words it seems. I 'll answer yo' remark, one at er time. I think I am a 'tending ter my own concerns. Ef it ain't my concern when you an' sich come along an' interfere betwixt me an' my sweetheart, I don't know when it *is* my concern! We was jist as content like as could be, till you put in yo' sneakin' face and 'ticed her 'way from me with yo' lyin' tongue. An' now it 's all up betwixt us, dog on yer! As to threat'nin' you publicly, I don't see no public 'roun'; they 're all gone; and *I* would n't 'vise ye to go an' give notice thet I 'd threat'ned ye, or somebody mought find out what ye hed done. 'Bout the laws, I ain't afeered of no law now; fur what 's a man's life when he hain't nothin' ter live for? As for the *status*, I don't know what yer mean by that, an' I don't keer, nuther."

Dr. Conway was no coward as far as the physical man went, but as we have seen before he was very much afraid of public opinion, and he seldom lost perfect self-control in an emergency. Buck's insults stung him, and for a moment the hot blood coursed through him and stained cheek and brow. He felt strongly tempted to raise the powerful arm, which hung so

passively at his side, and fell the impudent fellow at a stroke; he had no doubt of his ability, though Buck was stout and sinewy. But he was habitually accustomed to reconsider every impulse before he acted, and the reconsideration in this instance showed him plainly that what the man said about making their quarrel public was literally true. People would inquire what it was about, and *some* people would hear things he did not want them to. Yes, he would swallow the insult; meet it with contempt alone, and would say what he could to pacify the injured boor. These thoughts flashed through his mind in far less time than we have consumed in considering them, and there had been only the pause of an instant when he answered with as much unction as his anger would allow,

"Come now, McQuillan; you have worked yourself into a passion with no reason. I've said nothing about reporting you, and I've done nothing against you with your sweetheart; it is imaginary on your part as well as hers;" —but he looked down and blushed darker as he said it—"I have only showed the young lady common politeness, which she deserves, and if she misconstrued my intentions it is not my fault certainly. You go home now, my man, and talk it over with her; I think you will find it all right. I have not meant any harm to any one, and it is hardly the fair thing to hold *me* responsible for other people's mistakes." He was looking away from Buck; it made him uncomfortable to meet the keen, hot eyes—and giving a parting stroke to his beloved beard, as if to restore his dignity which he felt had been sadly ruffled, he walked away, without raising his eyes to the face of his angry companion. Had he done so, perhaps he had felt less comfortable as he joined Mrs. Brown, who was waiting at a little distance down the road, and watching him while she talked with Mary Lipscomb.

Buck was all impatience to speak as the Doctor left him, but in his anger was struggling for words. Now, when his adversary had gone, he licked his dry lips, and found speech, as he too went off for his mustang pony, which was hitched to a haw-bush near by.

"Curse him! I'll come up with him yit, ef he does treat me like a dog—not wuth his noticin'. Did n't mean nothin'? I say—'s ef my Aggie was the gal to set store by a man what nuver talked sugar-sweet to her; like 's ef she nuver had nobody to court her before, when I know I had to putty nigh git down on my knees to her 'fore she 'd take any notice to me! 'T ain't her I blame, nuther. Dog on him!" Striking the pony with the "quirt" which hung on his wrist, he galloped into the woods which lay between him and home.

Dr. Conway exchanged significant glances with Mrs. Brown as the man dashed out of sight. She looked a little anxious, but the Doctor's brown moustaches were lifted with a scornful smile as he assisted her into her buggy and handed her the reins.

"Mary, you and Laura get in too, and I will put you out at your gate, if you will not go home with me to dinner. It is getting too warm for you to walk. Oh, get in; no excuses!" and the kind woman made room for them beside her and drove off, leaving the Doctor to get his horse and follow at leisure.

"Mary, ask Laura how Agnes is," said Mrs. Brown.

"Has she been sick too?" inquired Mary, before putting the question to the mute.

"Well, not exactly sick, but very much affected, and, you know"—here Mrs. Brown looked over her shoulder at the Doctor, who was riding rapidly up, and, closing her eyes, shook her head in a very mysterious manner. Mary did not

understand, but nevertheless asked the question of Laura, who was gazing with wide-open eyes at them both, with a half-conception of what they were talking about. As she caught the full meaning of Mary's question, she drew a quick breath, throwing at Mrs. Brown a look of mingled fear and resentment. She answered "she is sick," and turned her blue eyes up with a piteous plea for secresy, which Mrs. Brown would not see, but continued her talk with Mary. But if she had counted on any confidential chat during that ride home, she had not given due consideration to Dr. Conway, for he did not seem to favor any such, keeping close behind the buggy, and having a great deal to discuss with both ladies. When they reached Mrs. Lipscomb's gate, he was quickly off his horse to assist them in getting out, and then he held the gate open for Mary to go in.

"Won't you come in and see mother, Mrs. Brown?"

"Thank you, I can't now; it is dinner-time, and I must get back; but I will come soon."

"There is no one at home to have dinner but Jennie, and I am sure she could do without you just this once. I will give you and the Doctor something to eat."

Mrs. Brown thought of her child, all impatience to hear her account—the budget of "notes" she had taken.

"Jennie would be lonely and uneasy about me. Besides, Bet is washing to-day, and I must look after *her*, too."

"If the *something* Miss Mary offers to furnish us means *pies*, like some I had here once before, 't would certainly be a great temptation; but, alas! the fates are against me, too. I've a call to make on my way home," and Dr. Conway petted his moustache with the gloved forefinger of his left hand, and smiled enough to reveal the very white teeth gleaming underneath.

Mrs. Brown wondered why he did not go on and attend to his call, instead of playing lacky to her and old Button, in a manner so foreign to his usual unconsciousness of any effort to be required of his huge and elegant person. She moreover wondered if he could suspect her fidelity to their contract, and had taken this measure to prevent any confidences between them.

"Little use, sir, if that *is* the game. What a woman wills she will, as you will find out when you've been married as long as I have." (Aloud), "Give my love to your mother, dear. Good-bye!" and she and Button and Dr. Conway went off together on the most excellent of terms, seemingly.

CHAPTER XIV.

BOB DEAN IN AN EMERGENCY.

IN the afternoon of the same day of the funeral, Mary and her mother were once more together in their sunny sitting-room. Mrs. Lipscomb was beginning to exhibit the appearance of returning health, and was now engaged in some knitting-work. Mary was sewing. She had been telling her mother about the funeral, and whom she had seen there. She mentioned Mrs. Brown's mysterious manner and remarks.

"She began to tell me something, when Dr. Conway rode up and she stopped"—and Mary did the same, for she concluded she had nothing really to tell her mother, and would wait until she had the conclusion of the secret. That it was something concerning the Doctor she had little room to doubt, and now her mind ran off to thinking about him—no

unusual channel was it, either. There has been a change in him since their interview in this room a week ago. Only a week? Can it be? He seems far from her now, and life is not as bright as it was. He avoids her, while evidently trying not to appear to do so; and he is constrained in her presence, affecting with a bad grace a manner free and jocular, as to a common friend, instead of the once pleading tenderness which appealed so irresistibly to her heart; yet, several times when not very near him, she has glanced up and surprised one of the old looks, full of love; but he would instantly disclaim it by an increased carelessness of manner, and bestow on her a stare, expressing nothing but blankness. Yesterday he informed her that he considered Mrs. Lipscomb out of danger, and would dismiss the case; yet, with the best of opportunity, had he desired to use it, made no approach to the subject left to be discussed when this happy day should arrive. He is offended with the repulse she gave his tender demonstrations that day, and is waiting for signs of encouragement from her before he renews them. Well, she is getting a little offended, too, and will hardly offer any overtures which might compromise her dignity. She is proud as well as he, and cannot feel that she has been in the wrong. Moreover, she has caught something of her mother's caution, and she does not believe in him as fully as she used to; yet—yet she loves him, and would be ashamed to have the sighs counted which have burst from her heavy heart this last weary week. How will it all end? Even should *they* come to an understanding, her mother would not be satisfied, for her liking has not increased, Mary can see, though they have made no allusion to the subject since that first talk. Another sigh.

Mrs. Lipscomb has been counting stitches in her stocking,

and setting off the heel all the while her child has been thinking her thoughts, but she has finished now, and her tongue is loosed.

"What about the Doctor, Baby?"

Mary starts. Has she been thinking aloud? She blushes as she answers,

"What do you mean, mother?"

"Has he found language in which to express his feelings yet?" The words might have been sarcastic, only that the motherly solicitude gave them a different meaning.

"About a week ago he spoke directly to the point, but I put him off on your account, and he seems offended with me since."

She has gained control of herself now, and speaks so very quietly that her mother cannot tell how she feels about it.

"And have you become offended too, because he is?"

"I can hardly say, mother. I do not think I gave him just cause of offence, and I cannot but regard it ungenerous in him to harbor such a feeling."

"If he can be ungenerous to you at this stage of affairs, he could be *unjust* when the future should give him power."

A pause of some moments, while a shadow of care broods in the girl's dark eyes. Only a dilation of her delicate nostrils, and a firm setting of her lips tell of the struggle it is to be calm as she answers,

"I am partly to blame. I spoke sharply and coldly to him, which his *words* did not warrant."

"Tell me why you did it, darling. You would not have done it without good cause." She has perfect confidence in her child's intuitive feeling, and wants to draw her out.

"It was his look, mother. I cannot express it to you, but it seemed to be a different being who looked out of his eyes,

and it was that one I answered before I stopped to think. I can't tell you—don't ask me."

"And, nevertheless, I understand you, Mary. I have seen that other being peer out through his eyes myself—only it is not another's, but his very own soul looking out through its windows. He generally keeps a fairer picture in front of the pane, but sometimes he forgets. Oh, my child, I cannot trust him with your precious life. He is not true, and you must get your heart back from him."

"But, oh! mother, I love him. I cannot deny to myself, neither will I to you, that I do love him; I did not know how well until this week, when he has been so far from me, and I have been so lonely without him. I wish I had never seen him. I never knew any trouble before." At last the gentle lips are trembling, and big tears well up in her eyes as her mother draws her head down on her bosom for comfort, even as Jennie Brown's mother had done yesterday because of this same man; but the motherly counsel is different.

"Let me help you, precious child, to give him up. I don't believe you love him as well as you think you do. You love only what you fancied him to be. Your idol is mostly alloy, and when you have fully learned how greatly the base metal preponderates in him, your affection will not survive the knowledge. I am getting well now, and next week we will go over to Cousin Tom's ranche, and spend the Christmas holidays with him, and Belle, and the children; and we will be happy again, and forget all about love and matrimony." She kissed her fair child, and pretended not to see the drawn lines of pain about her mouth, which told how great was the nervous pressure brought to keep up the courage of the wounded heart.

"I am very, *very* grateful, mother, that you are almost well. *Do* you feel nearly as well as you used to?"

"Yes; I believe I feel quite as well. The only uneasiness I feel is about this place on my temple. I am afraid it is growing to a tumor. I can distinctly feel the blood pulse in it." She laid her finger on a dark protuberance which had formed a little above the level of her eye, while the wound on her cheek was healing.

"Did you ask the doctor about it? What does he say?" said Mary, as she arose, and bending down put her hand on it too.

"He called it some hard name—aneurism, I believe; said the artery he tied had formed a sac here; that it might leave a blue-looking tumor, but he did not think it would grow any larger, nor did he apprehend any danger from it, and he hoped it would be absorbed in time. Let us not think any more about it now, Mary. Here comes Clarence Vaughn for his music lesson. Mr. Dean's school must be out a little earlier to-day."

Mary opened the door for her pupil, while Mrs. Lipscomb kept her seat by the fire and went on with her knitting, without interrupting the lesson, which made rapid progress. The hour passed quickly, for both teacher and pupil were wholly interested. As the youth rose from the instrument, he said,

"Miss Mary, Houston Ludwig told me to ask you if he might come and take music lessons, too?"

Perhaps Houston had said something else, too, which Clarence did not wish to repeat, for it was with a kept-back smile that he delivered the message.

"Houston? No; he shall not come. He does not want to learn music; he only wants a chance to tease me, as he does in Sunday-school," said Mary, her tone fault-finding, but her smiling face exhibiting only the kindest appreciation of the offender.

"He told me to ask you just as I was leaving school. Mr.

Dean heard him, and said, 'Tell Miss Mary pray grant his request. If music has the power to "soothe the savage breast," perhaps it may partially civilize him.' He laughed when he said it, and had his hand on Houston's shoulder. It 's astonishing how he manages that boy, Miss Mary. Houston thanked him for his 'recommend,' and came off singing 'do, re, mi' at the top of his voice."

It is a happy trio we see now—soon to be filled with consternation and grief.

"Houston is not half so bad, in reality, as some folks who pretend to be better," remarked Mrs. Lipscomb, rising and gathering up her knitting-work to go out. Her ball of thread fell on the floor, and as she stooped to recover it she uttered a smothered exclamation, and when she raised her head Mary was shocked to see the bright red blood spurting from the tumor on her temple.

"Oh, mother! mother!" was all she said, as she sprang to her, placed her flat on the sofa, and pressed her handkerchief tightly over the bleeding artery.

"Oh, Clarence, run to Mrs. Brown's for Dr. Conway! Quick! Oh, please first step to the kitchen—no, through this door here—for Laura. Beckon to her; she could not hear me call. Oh, mother! mother! what shall I do?"

"Don't be frightened, child. Just press hard with your fingers, and be as calm as possible. We must not get excited."

Clarence flew, as on the sandals of Mercury, and in a few minutes was bounding up the steps at Mrs. Brown's, not even stopping to knock. Bob Dean, standing at his window upstairs, had seen him coming. He knew he had been at Mrs. Lipscomb's, and saw dire news in his white face, so he was not unprepared to hear the tidings which greeted him when he met the boy in the hall below.

"Oh, Mr. Dean, where is the doctor? Mrs. Lipscomb has broken an artery, and is bleeding to death! Miss Mary sent—"

"Go on up-stairs, Clarence. The doctor may be in his room—front one, on the right; if he is not, come down and find Mrs. Brown, and get a horse and go after him wherever he is. I will not wait for you."

Bob saw nothing around him as he rushed down the street; knew nothing, save that never before had the distance been so long between him and Mary Lipscomb, whom his imagination could picture as in the scene we have described. He found her kneeling beside the lounge on which her mother lay, still holding her handkerchief to the bleeding artery with all her strength; but she had not succeeded in wholly stopping the flow of blood, which had escaped in such quantity by this time as to cause faintness. Laura was rendering such assistance as lay in her power, by bringing water, basins, sponges, camphor, etc. Bob could see at a glance that things were becoming desperate. Just as he entered, Mary turned her head away from the sight of her mother's white face, and the agony in her dark eyes was piteous to see; but when she saw Bob, she felt that help was come and took courage.

"What is the trouble, Miss Mary? Let me see, please," and, gently removing her hand, he quickly placed his forefinger on the artery just below the rupture.

"I see; it is a branch of the temporal artery. She has lost some blood, too. Let me get the thumb of my other hand on the wound, now—this way. It cannot bleed any more while I hold it, and *I will hold it* until help comes. You need not be alarmed, Miss Mary."

"Where is the doctor? is he coming?"

"I do not know whether he is at home or not. I left Clar-

ence to find him; but I hope he will be here soon. Your mother is turning sick; give her a drink of water; sponge her face with camphor. Can you and Laura raise her head a little higher? Yes; that will do. Now keep her lips wet, and fan her gently. Sit down, please."

Mary felt that a master will was in authority, and she obeyed, unquestioning. The genuine interest in their beloved patient, and sympathy for her own distress, were apparent enough in his grave, touched countenance, and she felt that it was a kind of stay and comfort to her.

They sat thus for full ten minutes without speaking, watching with solicitous eyes the dear, white face before them—Bob devoting his whole nerve to suppressing the flow of blood; Mary gently moistening Mrs. Lipscomb's lips, and fanning her to keep her from fainting; while Laura busied herself in clearing away the blood, and doing many little offices of usefulness, the need of which her quick eyes detected. Mary observed that Bob's hand was beginning to tremble.

"Can't we do something, Mr. Dean, to stay the blood besides to hold it that way? Is there no way to put a bandage on it?"

"No; we, that is, you and I, could not put on a bandage which would sufficiently restrict the vessel. Laura could not help, because she could not understand my directions. If we had another person we might. But I can hold it some time yet."

"Oh, I wish the doctor would come! I am afraid he was not at home," and she went to the door to look.

"I expect Clarence had to go somewhere after him," and Bob wished in his heart that it was in his power to supply all her need, both as physician and comforter.

After another interval, Mrs. Brown arrived. She kissed

Mary, and going up to the couch took Mrs. Lipscomb's hand.

"Dr. Conway left home just after dinner to attend a call over on Little River, nearly ten miles," she said. "He did not expect to get back till in the night; but Clarence Vaughn has gone after him."

"If he has to go all the way, it will be some time yet before he can get back, and Clarence *may* not find him there," said Bob.

They were all silent and anxious, until Mrs. Lipscomb moved her head slightly as if in pain.

"Miss Mary," said Bob, "I think we had better put on that ligature now, if we can. The pressure of my hand is painful to her. Get me a large handkerchief, a silk one is best—stay; you need not go for it. Mrs. Brown, if you will put your hand in the pocket of my coat, behind, you will find one that will do. Yes; that is it. Thanks. Now tie a very hard knot in the middle, and get a round stick, from four to six inches long—your curling stick will do, Miss Mary," and he glanced with a half smile at her rippling braids.

His quick orders and cheerful voice restored the confidence and courage of all present. Mrs. Lipscomb opened her eyes, and watched them with interest, though she did not venture to speak.

"Now, Mrs. Brown," said Bob, "you lift her head a little while Miss Mary slips the handkerchief under. Now tie the ends together, put the stick under it, and twist it. You had better close your eyes, Mrs. Lipscomb, for we will have to put the bandage low over your brow. Now draw the knot down, so that it will come immediately in the place my thumb is as I take it away. Turn the stick till it is as tight as she can bear. There; I think that will do."

"But, Mr. Dean, she cannot bear that long; it must be painful," said Mary, anxiously.

"I know it, Miss Mary. As soon as the doctor comes, he will take up the artery and tie it. It is a very simple operation. I could easily do it myself if I had his instruments."

"I wish he would come." The look of her eyes did not belie her words.

"Oh, he has not had time enough yet. He cannot get here before night, unless he had started before Clarence met him. I am afraid it is hardly safe to wait for him."

It was so unusual for Bob to suggest difficulties, or disturb one's mental comfort, that Mary's apprehensions were aroused anew. Bob was looking intently at her, and feeling his ground carefully, when he assayed the next remark.

"I understand that Dr. Stanhope returned from New Orleans last night; would you be willing we should send for him, Miss Mary?"

It was a moment before she answered; and in that moment several revelations flashed upon her mental perceptions. First, that Bob Dean had suspicion of the interest she held in Dr. Conway aside from his profession; and she could not control the crimson flood which swept over her cheeks and brow, though she knew it corroborated his opinion. Secondly, that Bob did not have an over-measure of confidence in the doctor; but whether the lack was towards physician or man, she could not tell—enough, that she felt angry with Bob for it. Thirdly, and most wonderful of all, she had more faith in Bob Dean's judgment than in any other body's, just now. This thirdly prevailed, and made her resolve to place all the responsibility in his hands that he would consent to bear; so she answered, looking full into his eyes,

"Yes; I am willing to have any one whom you think could

relieve mother. Dr. Conway could not object to the calling of another physician in this emergency."

"She still consults his feelings," thought Bob. "I wonder if it is as physician or as a lover."

The old look of repressed pain came back and settled on his face.

"Dr. Stanhope came home sick," said Mrs. Brown. "He could not come. He sent for Dr. Conway this morning. They think he has pneumonia."

"So we have no help then," said Bob, getting up, and pacing back and forth across the room. Suddenly turning, he stood before Mary, and looked down at her as she sat by the lounge, saying,

"Miss Mary, would you be willing, if I can get the instruments, to let *me* take up the artery? I can do it as well as any one, if you are willing to trust me."

"Oh, Mr. Dean, you pain me. Indeed I would be willing and very grateful. Why need you ask me?"

"Forgive me. I ask because I am unwilling to *assume* the responsibility. I would not do it, *with* your consent, only it is unsafe for the rupture to remain long in its present condition, and I should not be astonished if Dr. Conway does not get here before morning. Mrs. Brown, do you know where the doctor keeps the key to his surgical case—if he carries it with him, or if he has his instruments with him?"

"I don't know about the key. He only took his little medicine case with him," answered Mrs. Brown.

"I will go and see. Don't let any one come into the room to excite her. Have you any morphine, Miss Mary? it will be good for her to take an opiate."

Mary brought the desired article, and Bob very quietly measured out a portion and gave it to her to administer, while he stood and watched her.

"I believe you were cut out for a doctor," said Mrs. Brown, smiling.

"Think so? Much obliged. There are few other things I had rather succeed in. But I must 'cut out' now for something else. I will not be gone long."

"Could not some one else go, Mr. Dean? I am afraid for you to leave. Tell me what you want, and Laura and I will go," plead Mary.

"It is growing dark, Miss Mary. I cannot send you. Besides, no one else could get them for me as I can, provided I can get them at all. I could not tell you so you could understand. Do not be afraid; be of good courage, little child. Our Heavenly Father knoweth our afflictions."

He laid his hand for a moment on hers, as they stood in the door together, before he went out. She felt that a prayer was going up for her, and the thought, together with the few words of comfort, opened the floodgates of her burdened heart. She passed swiftly out into the gathering gloom, and fled around the house to her own room, where for a little while she let her tears have free flow. Then that Father who knoweth our afflictions drew her troubled heart to Himself, and gave her courage and comfort. When she returned to the room where Mrs. Brown was watching beside her mother, it was quite dark; so she busied herself with lighting the lamps, which she shaded and set in the back part of the room. After giving Laura some directions about the domestic work, she came and sat by her mother's couch. Mrs. Brown saw the traces of her tears, and thought,

"Poor child! I am glad she can cry; it will do her good. I am afraid there is many a tear close by for her. I will not tell her anything about that affair now; she has trouble enough; *it* can wait."

Mrs. Lipscomb was evidently enduring much pain from the pressure of the ligature; and the silent group listened anxiously for the sound of those brisk, firm footsteps, which they all felt could bring relief. They come now, with a clear ring on the gravel walk, and up the steps, and Bob comes in with a cheerful greeting:

"It is all right. I found the key and got what I wanted. Miss Mary, you must be mediator if Dr. Conway resents my meddling."

He laid down several curious-looking instruments, the sight of which made Mary shudder. Her strong, sweet face showed anxiety, but no lack of confidence in the surgeon. Bob could see this, and thought to give her a ground for her faith as he said,

"Ladies, that you may not think my assurance unwarrantable, I must tell you that this work is not altogether new to me. I served an apprenticeship of eight months last year in a large hospital, where such operations as this were of daily occurrence."

"I do not doubt it, Mr. Dean, and you may do it very well; but you must excuse me from looking on. The simple thought makes me sick," and Mrs. Brown moved away to the window.

"Is that so? Well, I shall need a little assistance here."

"I will help, Mr. Dean. I must look on, anyway; I could n't help that," said Mary.

Bob remembered how she had turned white while Dr. Conway was performing that first operation, and he felt somewhat doubtful of her, but he concluded to say nothing to shake her faith in her own strength.

We pass over the minutiæ of the work, lest, not having served our apprenticeship to the profession, we should bungle

the surgery, if Bob did not. Suffice to say it was well done. He worked quickly and neatly. Mary put in her little help when called for, calmly, with no show of flinching; only a tight pressure of the lips telling of any unusual strain on the nerves.

Now the patient is resting quietly, and all ugly-looking tools are put out of sight. They sit and rest, and talk awhile, relieved and cheerful after their intense anxiety. Presently, Laura comes for Mary, and after a brief absence she returns to say tea is ready in the dining-room.

"Mrs. Brown, will you go in with Mr. Dean? I will stay with mother while you eat."

"I could not eat a bite to save my life, Mary. You go and wait on Mr. Dean, and send me a cup of coffee by Laura. I'll stay here," and Mrs. Brown began rocking in her easy chair, to signify how very comfortable she would consider the arrangement.

"Come, then, Mr. Dean," said Mary

"Indeed I shall not offer any excuses, for I am hungry, and, besides, I have earned my supper," said Bob, gayly, following her into the little dining-room, which, it is sufficient praise to say, was as neat as her premises always were.

"Mr. Dean," Mary said, as she gave him a cup of tea, "I do not know how to thank you for all you have done to-night." Her voice trembled, so she had to stop.

"Thank me! Why, *I* do not deserve any thanks. I was only pleasing myself. Indeed, believe me, Miss Mary, I am very proud to have been able to do anything for you."

Bob's heart gave a great thump as he said it, feeling that he could gladly lay down his life to save her pain, and yet he dare not breathe a word of it. Had Mary Lipscomb possessed one-half of Jennie Brown's vanity, she would have

read his secret then, as he sat opposite her with averted eyes, fearing to trust himself to look at her in this unguarded moment, while great surges of passion swept over him, threatening to break bounds. But the will in this man was accustomed to rule, and so it did now. Now he leads the talk into safer channels, and cheerful, for her sake.

They go back to the sitting-room, and watch and wait for three long hours. Mrs. Lipscomb is sleeping, under the influence of the opiate. They talk a little in low, broken sentences, and wish the doctor would come. The little clock has just rung twelve when they hear him at the gate. He looks very tired and dispirited, and has evidently ridden hard. Bob, in a few words, explains all the circumstances of the case, adding,

"And now, sir, I will turn my patient over to your skill. I hope you will find all right, and pardon my interposition."

The Doctor's good manners were equal to the occasion, and, as Mrs. Lipscomb had awaked, he proceeded to examine the surgery. Then he turned to Mary, and, smiling, said,

"I congratulate both you and your mother on the skill of this 'prentice,' and do not flatter myself that I could have done the work any better. But now, I think she had better be removed, as gently as possible, to her own room, and undressed, that she may rest better. It is safer done now than later, and she will need to be kept more quiet than is possible in this front room."

Mary went out and made her mother's room ready; then, with Mrs. Brown, assisted her to bed.

"Now, Mary," said Mrs. Brown, "you will lie down beside her and sleep. It is no use for both of us to sit up, and I shall take *my* turn to-night. You will need all the rest you can get, before you are through with this."

"Oh, I could not sleep, Mrs. Brown; it would be no use to try. Let me watch, and you rest; I will call you, if she wakes."

"No; you must do as I say. If you do not sleep, you can rest, anyway. But first, you go tell Mr. Dean, I say he must go home and go to bed. He will have to be in school to-morrow."

"Yes; and I had forgotten that. Oh! Mrs. Brown, he is so good and kind."

She went back to the gentlemen, who were sitting by the hearth talking—Dr. Conway smoking his never-forgotten pipe.

"Mr. Dean, Mrs. Brown sent me to say that you must go home and retire, so as to be able for your work to-morrow. I dislike to send you home; as much as to say, 'now that Dr. Conway has come, we have no further use for you;' but it is best, I know."

There was a little twinkle of fun in her weary eyes, like the last sparkle of a dew-drop, ere the sun has drank all its life.

"Yes; it is best," said Bob; "I can do nothing more for you to-night. Give the Doctor a pillow on that lounge, and keep him here to-night, in event of another accident, which, however, do not understand me to apprehend. 'T would be depreciatory to my own work. Good-night!"

"Good-bye!" she said, putting out her hand. She had followed him to the door, and they stood half in the dark. "You say *I* must not thank you; but my *heart* does. If it had not been for you, I would have no mother now."

Bob covered the long white hand with both of his. He must be pardoned if the pressure upon it was warmer than mere sympathy warranted.

"God bless and protect you, child." He would have given all earthly possession then, to have had the right to draw that

fair head down on his bosom, and press a kiss on the trembling lips.

Poor Bob had to fight his battle all over again that night, as he walked home in the dark.

"Oh, God! I thought I was strong, but I am as a mere babe, compared to my love for her. I am afraid I shall have to go away."

CHAPTER XV.

"THAT OTHER DR. CONWAY."

AFTER Bob was gone, Mary passed around the yard into her little room, as she had done once before to-night; for Bob's blessing had again unsealed the fountain of her tears, and she wanted to escape the sitting-room and Dr. Conway, fearing to trust herself alone with him.

He noticed her avoidance, and fell to wondering. Could it be that she was really angry with him? She had grown more and more distant every day, but he had set this down to her fine sense of propriety, which, doubtless, was severely strained by the very equivocal relationship between them; but, while he chafed under it, it really suited his purpose well, just now. To use his own words, the Doctor was in a "sweet fix." It seemed as if those circumstances, to which he had referred in his conversation with Bob some days ago, were about to decide themselves, as he had predicted they would. And the crisis approaching, *he* could not make up his mind to be altogether satisfied with the result. He clearly understood that Mrs. Brown had him at her mercy, and intended he should marry Jennie if she wanted him to; it was no use

to deny the fact that he was very much afraid of Mrs. Brown. He intended at present to have her believe that he loved Jennie only, and entirely, and that it was a sense of his own unworthiness alone, which held him back from an immediate declaration of his passion. Nevertheless, he was *not* certain that he would marry the little beauty, if time should reveal any path out of this labyrinthian "scrape."

If Mary Lipscomb should find out about his disgraceful entanglement with Agnes Vinson, she would utterly despise him; and Dr. Conway, like Bob Dean, knew to-night that he had never loved Mary so well. But his heart was made of different stuff from Bob's; and it was not the sight of the sweet face, wet with tears, and the unbent lips telling the sore need of comfort, which touched his soul, but her quiet avoidance of himself, and the dawning fear that he might have to give her up. As I said once before about him, when he began to suspect he could not have a thing, he immediately found it impossible to be happy without it. So, to-night, he was really troubled, debating in his mind whether or not he should struggle against the chain of circumstances which were fastening around him, and about to bind him for life to one woman, while certainly more than half—and the better half, too,—of his heart, was another's. Had not his familiar spirit—selfishness—been leaning over the shoulder next his heart, and whispering dreams of luxury to his voluptuous nature, it is possible the man had conquered; but the propitious moment passed, and he was left, as usual, undecided.

Now Mary interrupts his troubled reverie, by coming in with some blankets and pillows to make him a couch on the lounge. When her task is done, she approaches the fire, and asks him, with solicitude, what he thinks of her mother's condition.

"I believe it is favorable, Miss Mary. The artery is securely tied, and I do not think it will give any further trouble. Mr. Dean understands the work. She may be pretty weak for some time, for she has lost some blood, but you must not feel uneasy about her. Can't you trust me to take care of her?" —the last tenderly.

Poor Mary has no strength for anything to-night, and the ready tears come fast again, sparkling like diamonds through her white fingers, as she covers her face and turns to the door.

He put out his hand and detained her, saying: "Miss Mary, you must not weep. Don't you know it is the undoing of a man to see a woman's tears—any woman's; much more, one he loves better than life? I cannot endure it; you must be comforted; you must let me comfort you, my poor, lonely darling!"

His arms are about her now, and he draws her head down on his breast, and presses his lips on her hair—he would have kissed her face, but her hands cover tightly all of it that is not hidden in his bosom, while great waves of sobs quiver through her.

I cannot make excuse for her weakness in permitting the Doctor such a liberty, but I know if you will forget to blame, and feel with her a little, you will pardon the momentary yielding. Her fear for her mother, which has broken down her strength and self-control; the gathering loneliness of the past week, when she has felt that between her and this man she loves, was yawning a gulf which grew wider with each sun and its setting; she sees, as a shadow, not daring to look fully at it, how utterly dreary her life will be when he is gone out of it forever: he must go, for her mother does not love him. She did not know he would ever speak to her again a word of the love for which she was hungering, and he ought not;

but she is like a wrecked mariner, with only a waste of tumultuous grief around her; and she rests her weary heart on his a moment, then, shuddering, draws herself away, covered with shame and self-reproach. He tries to hold her, but she will not suffer it.

"Please, let me go."

"My darling one, I cannot let you go from me. Come what may, I *must* have you for my own—mine to comfort and shield always. You were made for me, and I for you; I feel it, know it."

"Oh, please do not say any more. It cannot, can never be, and I have done so very wrong."

"Why can never be? I now know that your heart is mine, and who shall say us nay?"

He spoke fiercely, drawn by the fervor of the moment entirely out of himself. No titled suitor, with manor waiting for his bride, could have been bolder.

"I cannot tell you, Dr. Conway, now; but you must never speak to me of love again. And I must leave you, now."

He has her hand in a moment.

"I demand to know why, Mary. I have a right to know—"

The door opening softly, Mrs. Brown looks in to say that Mrs. Lipscomb is awake.

Mary's back was toward the door, and she had raised her tear-dimmed eyes to the Doctor's face, resolved to tell him the truth, feeling that, as he said, he did have a right to know, after what had just passed—why she should one moment suffer him to caress her, and in the next forbid him to even speak of love. And, looking, she saw such a change sweep over his countenance, as he quickly dropped her hand, that she was almost frightened; it was as if the image of a face in a mirror had given place to a new one—the first one, strong, and pas-

sionate with the burden of love; the second, crest-fallen, servile, condemned, and repudiating the first. She turned to look for a cause, and saw only Mrs. Brown, whose eyebrows were slightly lifted, but whose face betrayed not a thing.

Together they went into the sick-room, Mrs. Brown, Mary, and that other Dr. Conway—that was what Mary felt about it—and found the patient doing well. After the Doctor went out, Mrs. Brown again insisted that Mary should lie down to sleep.

"I cannot sleep. It is just as well I should watch and let you sleep."

Her voice tried to be brave, but was threaded with a hopeless cadence, piteous to hear.

"That certainly shall not be. I am here to sit up to-night, and sit up I will, if I have to assert my rights by force." Mrs. Brown's tone softened as she added: "You *must* rest, child; you look fearfully broken-down."

"I am not much tired," she answered gently, as she went about doing several little things in the room. She sent Laura, who was nodding in the chimney-corner, to bed, mended the fire, poured out a cup of hot coffee for Mrs. Brown, and placed an arm-chair near the fire for her. Then, getting a little, low chair, she put it at the foot of her mother's bed, and sat down, leaning her head on the bed.

"I will rest very well here, now. I don't want to leave you to-night," she said.

The clock ticked softly, Mrs. Lipscomb's breathing was sweet and regular, and but for these, silence had reigned. Mary's body was perfectly still, but her brain was in a tumult. Utter self-condemnation swept over her; then in its wake, like a return wave, came the swell of self-pity. For she was alone now; she had given her heart away, after sacredly

guarding it through the period of girlhood's gush, that it might be unscarred and whole for her womanhood's lover; she had let it go from her keeping, and it was lost. They could never be any more to each other, for her mother would never consent, and to oppose her will was not to be thought of. Besides, there was another barrier creeping up between them, which she could not define, but could feel. It was that other nature, which she had twice seen looking through his eyes—those dear, beautiful eyes which she loved: it was not he—her lover—but some interloper from the outside world, that had possessed the castle of his soul; she could not understand, and it made her shudder, as if in peril.

That one moment when her heart lay against his was very sweet, (though she was ashamed of it,) and would be always precious to remember, but it should never come again. She had passed through her crisis now, and would be stronger in the future. If her mother recovered, she would try to shut out every other love, and live henceforth for her. She prayed for strength—the kind of prayer which never falls unheard, when the poor human heart lets go itself and all human aid, and clings, child-like, to the Father-heart. The strength and peace came after a long time; and when the clock marked four in the morning, her regular breathing told Mrs. Brown that her weary young friend was asleep. She softly tucked a pillow under the tired head, and wrapped a shawl about her shoulders. At six there came a gentle tap at the door; not the partition door leading into the sitting-room, but the one which opened on the front porch. 'T was Bob Dean, whom Mrs. Brown admitted.

"How is she?"

"She has slept nearly all night; but, oh! she looks so white and awful."

"And *she*," he asked, looking down at Mary, who still slept, with one hand under her cheek, like a child.

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Brown.

Bob's gray eyes filled with tears as he looked at the pale, gentle face, with such new lines of grief interwoven with its beauty.

"Yes; poor child," he responded.

"She is in trouble."

"Indeed, she is."

"More trouble than one," said Mrs. Brown, looking at him.

"Yes."

The word was curious from the different tones blended in its one syllable.

"You have not had your breakfast yet, of course," said Mrs. Brown, speaking positively, though uncertain in her mind what vagary her household machinery might have taken in her absence.

"No. I only came to inquire. I am going directly back."

"Yes? I wish you would please go to the kitchen and tell Aunt Cindy to send breakfast down; all but the coffee—I don't want *her* to be bothered about anything that we can help," nodding towards Mary—"I mean breakfast for Mary and Laura and me; I will send Doctor home for his. I don't reckon Jenine is up yet."

"Yes, madam. I will attend to it; you are very kind and thoughtful." He felt as if he must thank her himself.

"Tell Jennie to come down after breakfast."

"I will. Good-morning."

"He 'd beat the Doctor taking care of her, if only things should turn out right. Humph! he was looking at her the whole time he was talking to me. Poor thing! she 'll need somebody to take care of her."

Reaching home, Bob made his way to the kitchen, and was smilingly received by the reigning genius, for the servants all liked him. He delivered his message, then asked Aunt Cindy for two fresh eggs and the egg-beater.

"De law! what de man want? Yaas, sir; I's got plenty aigs. Dar's they in de baskit on de shef. Hyar's de beater; want a bowl?"

He brought a flask of old brandy from his room, and had soon concocted an egg-nog, perfect in quality of material as well as manufacture.

"Carry that to Miss Mary, Aunt Cindy; and tell her to take one half of it for her own good, and then to finish it for my sake."

"La sakes! I will. Pore chile! 'spects she needs it, too."

CHAPTER XVI.

TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS.

THE days and weeks move on.

For a long while Mrs. Lipscomb's condition was critical indeed; not only on account of the ever-present danger of a fresh rupture of the artery, but in consequence of the extreme depletion from loss of blood. Kind friends waited, with bated breath, at her bedside by day and by night. Mary felt that the new adversity had brought its own blessing in the precious gems of friendship, unknown or unrecognized before.

Mrs. Brown, with an unprecedented disregard of her cherished household affairs, had constituted herself nurse-in-

chief, and only went home at intervals to overhaul Aunt Cindy and Mat. One was at a loss to understand the power of endurance knit into her buxom little body. Moreover, Mary thought she had never known such tender solicitude as this same little body bestowed on her; indeed, Mrs. Brown's manner was as if she had, at some time, done her an irreparable injury, but intended to make all amends in her power. Jennie, too, came and went, doing what she could. And Bob Dean was simply invaluable—tireless, as nurse and adviser in general. All the others, the Doctor not excepted, yielded to his peculiar influence over matters—an instinctive administrative capacity, by which he always knew what should be done, at the right time, and by whom. But Bob himself, with an unconsciousness that was as charming as it was genuine, was ignorant of the fact that he was acting a notable part, and almost enjoyed the work he was doing, both for the very work's sake and because it was done for Mary. He would have wholly enjoyed it if he could have taken all her pain and care on himself. But it wrung his heart to see her grow thin and pale; to see the beautiful eyes dark-ringed and weary; the gladsome smile supplanted by sorrow-lines. And there were some lines which he did not understand—which seemed to belong not to her grief and anxiety about her mother; nor were they themselves tokens of weariness, but were added to these, and seemed to borrow their pain from a yet deeper and more bitter fountain. He could not understand, but he prayed that her strength of body and of heart might be equal to the demands. And he did all he could to relieve and sustain her.

The weeks passed on and her mother grew better; then the daughter looked a little less pale and weary, and was cheerful again. But the shadow was on her pure face still, like the echo of a sorrow, unnoticed, save by those who loved her.

Her mother saw, and understood it; Bob saw, and could not understand. And now the rolling weeks have nearly numbered out the days of the year.

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Seven o'clock, Christmas morning! And such a morning it was! We all remember what a perfect day was the 25th of December, 1877. The sun, just rising, touches with a golden glory the landscape, far and wide. The crisp, clear air, taken in with the spirit of the day, is simply intoxicating. There is a new spring-wagon standing in front of the livery-stable, and two mettled grays, hitched to it, are stamping out their impatience. It is Bob Dean who now comes up, and carefully placing his folded shawl on the seat, springs in and takes the reins from the boy in waiting.

"Have they been well fed, Simon? I want to put them through this morning."

"Yes, sah! dey 's had 'bundance to eat, and dey 's willin' to travel, too. Boss, he don't send dem fellers wid ev'rybody what wants hosses. Dey takes a driver to hold 'em, you bet."

"Well, I don't want to hold them, so it does not matter whether I am a driver or not. Let them go!" and Bob gave the signal to start, somewhat hastily, for he saw approaching a group of his new friends, whose curiosity as to his destination and purpose, and whose probable commissions, would need more time to satisfy than he cared to spare this morning. He raises his hat to them, as the grays bound down the hard road, rejoicing in their oats and liberty.

He is going to Rockdale to-day, to meet and bring back his mother to spend the holidays with himself and friends. If the lady were his sweetheart, he could hardly be more eager for the meeting. I have not, with my pen, been able to tell the cross which this separation from his mother was to him.

Every day his heart had hungered for her presence. Most men, ere they reach the age of twenty-six, have enshrined some other woman in the inner temple of their hearts; but it was Bob's weakness, if weakness it be, never to have learned to do without his mother. The knowledge that, Providence permitting, he would soon have her with him again, had seemed to increase his eagerness during the last week. He had borne his new trouble only by pushing it off till she should come to share it with him.

At first he had thought to conquer his love for Mary Lipscomb, believing that as it had been born in an hour, it might perish by violence. The passing days had showed him the fallacy of this hope; his passion took new root every time he saw her, and developed strength in her absence, until now he could not even wish, *honestly*, to conquer it; he thought he did, but still he knew that to love her was very sweet, if it was dashed with the bitter. Then he determined to bury himself in his work, and *live* it down, crowding out thoughts of her with daily labor, full-measured, pressed down, and running over. But her dire need of help in her mother's illness had appealed to him in a way he could not resist; his love had gladly seized the excuse to be in her presence and extend the precious comfort which was "twice blessed" in the flow and reflux. And now, the prospect was that thoughts of her would crowd out the duties. Had he entertained hope of winning her, then these thoughts had been helps, but when they came laden with despair, it needed all his manhood to meet them and work on. Bob *had* no hope of winning her; or, if any, it was an impalpable, unrecognized hope, for he was satisfied she loved Dr. Conway; and that gentleman had so much advantage of him, in prior acquaintance, in worldly prospect, and in personal appearance, that to enter the lists against him

would be sheer folly. Besides, as he had once said, it was not honorable to try to win another man's sweetheart, and so was not to be thought of. Had he known exactly how affairs were standing between Mary and the Doctor, he might have taken heart; but he did not know, so he had come to the fore-mentioned conclusion, that he must go away. This he could not do just now, for he had contracted to teach the school at C—— for four months, two of which were yet unexpired. And what reason could he assign to the school-committee for breaking a contract? That he had fallen in love, forsooth, and must run away! Nay, verily; there must be some other way. Well, his mother is coming, and he will see what *she* says; women know how to reconcile so many things which puzzle men. So we see that self-interest was mingled with affection, and the two sent his heart-throbs to keep time with the flying hoofs, as he and the grays sped onward to meet the iron horse. The miles were not few, but they were quickly traversed, and he found, on reaching the station, that he was before the train. He fastened his team, and went to look at the town. It was several months after the fire that consumed the original rude buildings, and Rockdale was now beginning to boast herself of a brick block or two, which, in their new splendor, frowned down upon the wooden structures over the way. All was stir and bustle to-day. Merry-makers abroad lent their boisterous mirth to the din of commerce. Country wagons coming in, laden with cotton, their drivers, eager for "our share of eggnog," met by cotton-buyers eager for "our share of trade." Wagons going out, laden with lumber and freight, whose drivers had had their "share," and were making loud testimony thereof. All are glad and gay, or want to be. And now the shrill whistle announces the incoming train, and everybody rushes to the depôt. A little lady, dressed in

black, appears on the carriage-step, and is lifted down bodily by a big man in gray, who holds her as if he would never let her go. Ah! Bob Dean knows there *is* one woman in the world who loves him, and he proudly leads her off to where the wagon is waiting, and, taking her check, comes for her trunk.

"Wonder if that is his wife?" said a bystander.

Bob hears, and laughs his old cheery laugh, so wondrously silent of late.

"Well, little mother, you can't know how glad I am to have you," said Bob, proudly, as he took his place beside her in the wagon.

"Oh, my boy! my boy!" She cannot do the subject justice, so she does not try, but folds both of her little black-gloved hands over his knee, and feasts the hungry mother-eyes on his wholesome, beloved face. They are very alike, when one comes to think of it—both blonde, with chestnut hair, sunny and curling, and the same deep gray eyes and pleasant mouth. She does not look like the mother of this big man, for she is only forty-five, and appears much younger. But "little mother" is very pale and thin, which Bob now observes, and fears she has been working too hard.

"Not more than usual," she answers. "But, Bob, you *have* been working too much—or worrying—which, my boy?"

And now they are beginning in earnest to talk over all "those things" about which we already know.

We will leave them to get dinner at the "Brooks" house, and come home together, well assured that by the time they reach C——, she will have come into possession of all he can tell of his surrounding circumstances, besides having several shrewd opinions of her own.

Mrs. Brown's house is full to-day. Jennie is entertaining

company in the parlor, and Mr. Brown dispensing liberal eggnog to a party of his friends in the dining-room. But the family sitting-room is unoccupied; and there Mrs. Brown cordially receives Bob and his mother, and proposes to show the lady to her room immediately, that she may refresh herself after her journey.

Jennie has kindly given up her room, which was adjoining Bob's, to their guest, that she might be continually near him during their brief reunion. A door between, long locked, is now thrown open, and Mrs. Brown proposes to leave them, with the request to "come down as soon as you feel like it, and I will give you some dinner. Ours is over."

"Thanks! But we dined in Rockdale; early, it 's true, but heartily. Would you have anything more, mother?"

"Oh, no; nothing; I thank you, madam."

"There is plenty left, if you want it; we will not have a hot supper to-night, as dinner was so late, but we 'll have a snack and some coffee by-and-by. I suppose you will want to go to the Christmas Tree to-night? Please call for anything either of you want, Mr. Dean," and the kind-hearted woman shut the door and went down stairs, envying "little mother" her devoted son, and almost wishing Jennie might have *him* instead of Dr. Conway. "Dr. Conway talks about his folks as if they were somebodies, but I *know* Mr. Dean's mother must be a nice woman." Mrs. Brown would not acknowledge even to herself that she had married beneath her own grade in society; but still she was determined that *Jennie* should look up and not down.

"Need not go out, son. I shall not dress, but only get rid of the dust. Please brush my back;" and she handed him the whisk-broom and turned her back. He placed his broad palm on her slender waist, and carefully did as he was bidden;

then sitting down in Jennie's rocking-chair, drew Mrs. Dean down on his knee—a habit they had of sitting when they had anything particular to talk about. She fondled his curls, and caressed his broad forehead with one little, thin hand, leaving the other on his shoulder; and they talked on.

"There is one piece of news I have brought you, Bob, which I have been loth to tell, because the subject has always been painful to us both. Yet most men at your time of life would hail it as the best of news."

Getting down from his knee, she went to her trunk and produced a formidably big envelope, which she handed to him, and took a seat near, while he possessed himself of its contents. He read slowly, first a little sheet, then a long one with legal seals; he folded them carefully and replaced in the wrapper, scarcely breathing for astonishment. He held the package between thumb and finger, and looked at the fireplace, but spoke not a word; his pale face and compressed lips gave no token of any good tidings in the document he held so gingerly.

Mrs. Dean spoke softly: "Reparation, Bob. Late, but just. It seems her conscience would not let her keep it any longer."

"Is her health failing? Is she afraid of death, that she does this before she goes to meet my poor father, whom her cruel hand pushed into an untimely grave?"

"I do not know. The letter is addressed, as you see, to the lawyer, and simply states, that some years ago the proceeds arising from the sale of a valuable ranche in Western Texas came into her possession, but that later events have revealed the fact that the money more rightly belonged to another heir of Judge Dean's estate—a half-brother of hers. And that herein he would find proper papers making the transfer to said heir, and a reference to the court records; she hoped he would be able to arrange the business satisfac-

torily, and find said heir; otherwise, the property would revert to herself again as natural heir. That is all I know, except that one Mr. Owens, of the law-firm of Owens & Cotter, called on me, to tell me that it *is* all correct, and that there is now, subject to your order, the sum of ten thousand dollars in the National Bank at Austin. And it makes you, comparatively speaking, a rich man, Bob, at last."

"It is yours, mother, by right; and shall be."

"It makes no difference whose it is, my dear; of course the good will be the same."

"Yet I am not glad to have it from her now, remembering that father died of the grief and shame she brought upon him. She cannot make amends."

They sit silent awhile, then Bob says, gently:

"At any rate, mother, *you* need not work any more," and he comes behind her, and drawing her face back, kisses it.

"And you can get off from the school, and go away and rest until spring lectures open," she answers, softly.

Bob lets go her head and walks up and down the room, but says nothing. He is wondering if he really wants to go away, and thinking how proud he would be of this fortune, if he could but bestow it on a certain queenly woman he knows and loves.

CHAPTER XVII.

BOB DEAN'S MOTHER.

THE December sun is near his setting, when Bob brings his mother down to the parlor, to introduce her to his friends assembled there.

They are not gathered here solely to do her honor, but in part, because Mrs. Brown's parlor is a pleasant place always; nevertheless, Bob Dean's mother is a person of much interest to many who have learned to know him; and several people besides the family are here this afternoon.

Jennie gracefully comes forward and kisses her like an old friend, which mark of favor Bob appreciates.

Dr. Conway offers his hand in response to the introduction, while a genuine cordiality glows on his handsome face. There is something genial about the little woman, which draws all hearts to her in friendship.

Mrs. Dean's gray eyes measure the Doctor carefully, to see what manner of man this can be, whom a young lady could prefer to her Bob.

"The most of him is outside," is her summing up. "If she loves *him* best, I don't care, for she can't see far, and could not appreciate my boy."

Clarence Vaughn and Houston Ludwig are next presented. She is glad they are here, because she loves boys as a class.

And now Mrs. Brown introduces a lady who is a stranger to us also. To written communications, she signs "Mrs. G. Bernice Delgado;" but the lady's appearance is not as pretentious as is her name. She is a widow, no longer young, though she displays a simplicity and vivacity which most prudent *young* ladies would prefer to conceal or to temper. She has a little daughter with her, and is making a "dead set" at Dr. Conway, much to that gentleman's annoyance, just now.

Mr. Brown gives Mrs. Dean a chair, and assumes the task of entertaining her.

"Your son tells me you've been a good while in Texas, ma'am—greatest kentry in the world, *it* is."

"Yes, sir. I have been here quite a number of years, and have found it a good country."

"You did n't see the stormy times we did—that was 'bout all over by '49. B'lieve Mr. Dean said that was the year you come."

"Yes. But there was at least a wind-cloud in '50. You remember, there was some apprehension of Texas withdrawing from the Union, and assuming her nationality, on account of the Santa Fé trouble—in case of which, many feared war would ensue."

"Oh, yes; that was a little blow—all wind, though—never 'mounted to a groat—Texas stood up for her rights, as she always does, and got her debt paid off by it. Great kentry, tell you that."

Mr. Brown had had *his* share of eggnog, too; and when under the benign influence of such, it was his habit to brag about his country, his wife, or his daughter; or to abuse tax-paying and mill-hands.

"How long you been a widow, ma'am?"

"My husband died in '58."

"You don't say so! Now I tell you what—just—"

"Come, papa; you are selfish in monopolizing Mrs. Dean. We all want to talk to her, too," interposed Jennie.

She saw that Bob was uneasy while they talked of personal matters; for some of these things about which Mr. Brown was so free, were too sacred for even mother and son to pass free converse upon. Besides, Jennie saw that her father's potations had been liberal, and she feared for him. She could not bear he should appear at disadvantage, for she very tenderly loved this rough old father. But before conversation was resumed, after her interruption, there was a new arrival. Who, of all others, should it be, but Mary Lipscomb.

"Why, Mary! I'm so glad to see you, and so glad your mother is well enough to let you come," Jennie cried, as she embraced her.

"Mrs. Vaughn came in this afternoon to sit with mother, and she insisted that I needed fresh air and must walk—"

"So you do, child. You are as pale as can be with watching," put in Mrs. Brown.

"And so I came around to see you all, and Mrs. Dean;" and she went up to that lady without waiting for an introduction.

It was something to see Bob's face as those two people kissed each other. Jennie saw it. In her acuteness she read what he hoped for in this visit of his mother's—hopes he was not himself aware of; and Jennie seconded those hopes from the bottom of her heart; for if he got his wish, so would she get hers about somebody else.

Mrs. Dean scrutinized Mary as closely as she had the Doctor; and Bob could see that, as far as appearance counted, even her fastidious taste was satisfied.

"Your son has been very good to us, madam, during my mother's illness; and since he will not let me thank him, I have come to tell you about it."

She is wholly unconscious of how lovely she looks as she says this, or of any reasons one could find for being good to her, save those of pure philanthropy. Dr. Conway looks at her from his miserable corner, where the fair widow holds him unwilling captive. The little Bernice Delgado has presumptuously placed herself on his knee, and plays with his seal ring. Mrs. G. Bernice Delgado is flattered that the good Doctor should fondle her poor little orphan girl; while the good Doctor heartily wishes he dare choke said orphan, for he hates children above all things, and this child above all

children. He has seen a great deal of Mary Lipscomb during the last weeks, and never before has he seen her so lovable. The wearisome duties of the sick-room, where, hour after hour, and day after day, her mother's life has hung by a thread, as it were; the many trials of strength and judgment, where her patience and self-control have never flagged—these things have developed in his mind a respect for her sex, which hitherto has been foreign to him. He has seen the graceful limbs grow weary, the soft eyes dark-circled with continued watching, but he has never found her fretful, has never heard her complain. His love for her has grown stronger daily, while he feels she is gradually slipping away from him. During those tedious days and nights he has never found himself alone with her in the watch, except at such times as the patient required all of their united attention. When his hand accidentally touched hers, and this has happened several times in their mutual offices of physician and nurse, she would quickly remove hers, but he looked in vain for that rare color to suffuse her cheeks and brow, as once it would have done. If he assayed sentiment, she met it with a practical common sense, which made his soft speeches sound ridiculous. Yet he could find no just cause to reproach her, for she was always polite, gentle, and kind. It made him half beside himself to see her meet Bob Dean with a cordiality she did not give to him. There was a friendliness in their intercourse which told of mutual trust, and the ease of a brother and sister. Bob's quiet humor could coax the dimples back to their old place in the pale cheeks, and many hours of quiet, sensible converse had they in the evenings and half nights that Bob gave to his friend's help. The lamp, burning low, would be left in Mrs. Lipscomb's room, and at short intervals Mary would slip softly in to watch the sleeper; but then she would return and

sit in the front room and talk with Bob, while Laura leaned against the corner of the chimney and watched them with her wide eyes, or took sly naps, and let her head thump, at which Mary and Bob would laugh. And the Doctor lay on the lounge in the back of the room, and pretended to be asleep, while he listened to their talk, if might be he should hear something which would be food for the jealousy which was racking him. But, no; had their conversation been published, the world would have only thought that they had a great deal of pleasant and profitable chat, full of noble ideas and novel, singularly free from what is popularly called sentiment, considering the age and sex of the parties. The Doctor furthermore observed that Mary always chose to sit up that part of every night, when Bob or some other friend did, leaving some neighbor to share *his* watch. Why he should volunteer to nurse this patient, even a part of the time, he was not able to tell—he did not usually add the labor of nurse to the skill of physician. He only knew he could not content himself long out of that house when Bob Dean was in it. Ah! the perversity of human hearts. This same cordial, sisterly confidence which Dr. Conway begrudged, Bob read as a most unpropitious sign for himself. Had she been coy or timid of him, he could have hoped; but if his years had numbered sixty instead of twenty-six, she could not have been less embarrassed in his presence. The secret of the whole matter was, that as regarded Bob Dean, she thought not of herself at all, while she was afraid of Dr. Conway—or her own heart—and being on her guard, was not her natural self. Her strength had not failed her again, and she had borne her part bravely; until now the Doctor really began to wonder if that one moment of her weakness, when he had held her head on his bosom,

had not been a dream: he began to question if he had not even been mistaken in believing she loved him.

The Doctor's mind, from wandering on these matters, came back to the conversation in the room. Mrs. G. Bernice Delgado is still talking—what about, he can't pretend to say. He does not try to listen, but only smiles, and ejaculates at intervals, "Yes," or "Please tell me all about it," etc., satisfied she will go on. But Mary is saying something now, and he listens to that.

"Mrs. Dean, I suppose all the family here will wish to go to the Christmas Tree to-night. Mr. Dean will have to go, as he is appointed Dispenser. I thought, perhaps, as you are a stranger, and have been travelling, you would prefer to be quiet. So I came around to ask you home with me, to spend the evening until the exercise is over; they can come by for you if you like—it is right on the way. Mother says she can't wait till to-morrow to see you," and Mary smiled at the thought.

She stood still and waited for her answer. Mrs. Dean glanced around to ascertain the sentiment of the friends in whose charge she felt herself.

"Oh, no! Mrs. Dean, we want you to go to the Tree. It will be beautiful. Mr. Dean and *I* decorated it yesterday!" exclaimed Jennie, while Bob smiled at the vanity of her words.

"Let her suit herself, daughter. If she feels like being quiet, she will enjoy the company of Mrs. Lipscomb and Mary. She has been used to Christmas Trees, and will not think ours extra."

Mrs. Brown evidently was willing.

"I believe I would do it, mother," said Bob, thinking what a nice time they would have getting acquainted.

"Then, thank you, Miss Mary; if you will wait until I get

my wraps, I will accept your kind invitation." So saying she passed out of the room.

"That is too bad! I counted on 'scortin' her out to-night," grumbled Houston.

"Humph! I was a-goin' to do that myself, my man," said Mr. Brown.

"Miss Mary, were it not that I have the promise of the best of company to-night, I might angle for an invitation to do likewise," said Bob, laughing and looking at Jennie.

"Your company will excuse you, Mr. Dean, if you want off."

Jennie looked so saucy that Dr. Conway, off in the corner, gnashed his teeth in desperation.

"Oh, not at all, Miss Jennie. I am only deploring that all the good things come at once; and a surfeit of sweets always clogs my digestion.

> 'How happy could I be with either,
> Were 't other dear charmer away.'"

The merriment of his manner took away the suspicion of vanity, and they all laughed.

"Perhaps, Mr. Dean, the knowledge that all the 'sweets' are not for your delectation, may have a salutary effect on your enjoyment of what is left you," said Mary, sweeping him a stately courtesy.

"Thank you for the hint, Miss. I don't care, though; I don't believe you and mother are going to have such a *very* nice time, anyway."

"Perhaps not—sour grapes!"

Mrs. Dean came in now, ready to walk; and Mrs. Brown at the same time, from the dining-room, saying refreshments were on the table, and all must come in and partake.

"No, Mrs. Brown; really I *must* not leave mother any longer now. I left Laura getting tea ready at home, and please excuse us. I have nearly all of Christmas dinner left; so I can give Mrs. Dean plenty, even if she is very hungry. No, Mr. Dean; you shall not go with us; stay and get your supper; it is not yet dark. Good-bye."

They go out together, and Bob feels happier than he has done for a month.

Dr. Conway hails the call to supper with such a thrill of delight as the captive may feel, when his gyves are stricken off, ere he has tried his new freedom. He is sure Mrs. G. Bernice Delgado will want to eat, for it must need abundant nourishment, and often, to enable her to talk forever. He declines refreshment, for fear of being next her at the table, and goes up-stairs to his pipe, while Jennie laughs at his woe-begone face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"WE'VE MET AGAIN, IT SEEMS."

THE Union Church, brilliantly lighted and decorated, is filled with a gay and elegant throng, now in a confused state of hilarity. The late bedecked Tree is denuded of its splendor, and the merry people are flocking out, the fortunate ones triumphant, and the neglected few indifferent. It is not the custom here to confine the favors of Kriss Kringle to the Sunday-schools or the juveniles; but all classes and ages participate, every one having the privilege of using the Tree as a medium of conferring Christmas gifts. The only tax imposed is, that the public shall have a good view of each article before

it reaches the hand of the happy (?) recipient. Many a burst of merriment goes up as the business proceeds, over the curious, and often inappropriate, gifts.

Bob Dean, with his genial spirits, has been the centre of interest to-night; and Jennie Brown has shone in his reflected glory, as participant with him in the honor of dispensing the favors.

Dr. Conway has occupied a back seat, literally and figuratively; and he does not like it very well. His handsome face is gloomy and lowering as he pushes out into the darkness. He avoids his party, and calls, on his way home, at the post-office for the evening mail. There is a letter for him, which he puts in his pocket. At home, the house is silent and almost dark. Mr. Brown calls to him from the sitting-room:

"Come in, Doctor, and set with me. The folks hain't got back yit; they stopped at Widder Lipscomb's for Mrs. Dean, and I come on to start the fire. They 'll be home terreckly, dessay."

"Thank you, Mr. Brown; I've a letter to read, and will go up to my room, I believe."'

"Well, here 's a note for you; somebody is a-wantin' you to-night."

It is an urgent call to come as soon as possible to a sick man. But the Doctor is in no mood to take any unusual trouble to-night; so he makes himself comfortable with his pipe, and proceeds to read his letter. It proves to be in reference to the speculation in the Kansas cattle-drive, to which he once made reference in our presence. While he reads, his harassed face breaks into a gleam of exultation.

"Well, that is some good luck for me at last. I thought my good fortunes were about to desert me, but perhaps this is a harbinger of a turn for the better. Let me see—Gordon

and I will each clear about two thousand dollars, that pull. By Jove! I believe I 'll risk my luck in love, too, while 'Fortune is on her giving hand.' I can't stand this uncertainty much longer. It will wear me out—make me haggard, gray; spoil my temper and my looks."

He went to the mirror and finished his speech to his image reflected therein:

"I must have my girl, or something desperate will result. I believe she is only holding off, because she sees my uncertainty. I just know she does love me, when I look facts squarely in the face—she can't help it. But, bless her sweet heart, she is prudent and shrewd, and won't commit herself, while I seem to be wavering as I have been of late. I believe I 'll decide the matter *this very night.* I know it will make a blow-up here, when it comes out. Mrs. Brown considers that I have tacitly spoken for Jennie, since the intimation I made when I was crowded in that Agnes Vinson matter. She understands that I want to marry Jennie, and don't want any scandal on her account; and it is on that consideration that she is to help me keep it down. Really, she has assumed quite a motherly care over my unworthy self. By my soul! I don't care for all of them, if Mary will only marry me. I can brave it all for her sake; and I will, backed by my reputation and this two thousand dollars."

He gets a sheet of delicate, perfumed paper, selects a fine-pointed pen, and seats himself to the task of writing a "straight-out" proposal; he runs his fingers through his tawny curls to strengthen his resolution, and in a dramatic tone, exclaims:

"'Now, by Apollo! be a man for once
Be for once strong, or be forever weak!'"

"MISS MARY LIPSCOMB:—My Darling Love! I can endure this suspense no longer. For a long time—how long a time—I have hoped to win your love, and sometimes fondly believed the precious boon was mine; but, alas! as I would dream of putting out my eager arms to seize the blessing, you would float out of my reach on impalpable wings of coldness—or was it only *coyness*, Sweet? The past weeks, since that *one* precious moment, so ecstatic, so brief, when I idly dreamed the treasure next my heart could be held there forever—these past, lonely weeks, in which you have kept yourself so far from me, have taught me how idle would be the thought that life could have any joy without you. Why do you treat me so, sweet angel woman? You forbade me to speak of love to you again. I have obeyed, hoping to propitiate the timid spirit which I had frightened with my ardor. But I may *write* it; may I not, dear love? You have put me off with your coldness, and I have borne it as best I could; my impatience will no longer brook restraint. You already know how well I love you; or if you do not, my pen is not able to tell you; but know this—the happiness of my life is bound up in your noble self. And not only happiness, but all there is of life to me—all the possibilities of good in my manhood. *With* you, I feel I can go onward and upward, to attain any goal of honor and purity toward which we may set our united standard; *without* you, there is nothing ahead in this world—far less than nothing in the next. I have been loth to lay open to you some of the pages of my life, because I feared your pure heart might recoil from an escutcheon less white than your own. I have never before, in so many words, asked you to marry me, because I am poor in the 'filthy lucre,' and shrank from involving your dear life in poverty; but fortune has smiled on me at last—just a little gleam; and my eager heart seizes the *avant courier* as an omen of other good things in store for—for us, may I say? among which is the yielding of your dear self to my proud keeping. I will lay bare before your judgment all my past, my every secret thought, be it good or ill. I lay down my heart at your feet; I would leave my life in your hands. Will you, Mary, accept the offering upon Love's altar? Remove that dreadful ban, and give me leave to talk

to you about it; say when, dear one. And ah! may the sweet spirit of Love brood in your heart, and win it over to mercy. Yours, as never any other body's,

DUVAL CONWAY."

He read the epistle over, folded, sealed, and addressed; then he held it at arm's length and said:

"If it is not the whole truth, what there is is true, if ever I wrote or spoke the truth; and, by Jupiter! I find myself gloriously in earnest about it, too. If she accepts me, I will begin life anew; if she refuses, the dogs may take what is left of me; or, I will pursue pleasure, which is the next thing to it."

And now he goes to answer his professional call, the weightier matter of his love-letter being executed. The said matter he deposited in the post-office box, as he rode through town—dropped it in, feeling somewhat as if he had cast a lot for good or evil fate. When he has left all the houses of the village in the wake and is entering the Post Oaks, he hears a horse's hoofs behind him. He glances uneasily over his shoulder—the Doctor has grown nervous of late—and sees Houston Ludwig, who accosts him as he rides alongside and checks his speed.

"How air you, Doc? Somebody sick Chrismus night? B'lieve ef I had my way, I 'd as leave take some other time."

"And what brings *you* out at this time of night? I suppose *you* have no patient to attend."

"I 'll stand in need of somebody's *patience* if I can't git this booger of a pony to travel 'thout so much quirtin'. Oh, we boys—some of us—air goin' to have a lark out here in the country to-night. But you mus' n't tell on me, Doctor. I don't keer 'bout Mr. Dean knowin' I'm one of 'em."

"Does n't he allow you to do as you please during the

holidays? When I was *your* size I'd have shown *him* a thing or two."

"No, you would n't, neither—leastways, he'd a showed you mor 'n you could him; you don't know Mr. Dean. Not that I'm skeered of him, though. He never said nothin' to us boys 'bout what we was going to do durin' holiday, only that he hoped we would n't forget that we were all going to be gentlemen. Still, I kinder think he would n't like what we're up to to-night. 'T any rate, 't would be as well for you not to say anything 'bout seein' me."

There was a suspicion of threat in the boy's piping voice.

"Oh, I shall not 'peach.' I believe in boys having their fun," said the Doctor.

He knew too much of the world to wish to incur the ill-will of the boys of any place he desired to live in.

They had left the wooded road and were crossing a strip of prairie, when they heard the sound of a horse galloping rapidly up behind them. Houston slouched his hat over his face, humped his shoulders, and thrust out his elbows, till, in the uncertain light of the just rising moon, he might have passed for fifty instead of fifteen. The rider comes up and passes them; but, when about thirty yards beyond, stops, wheels his horse, and waits for them to approach. Dr. Conway feels the blood curdle about his heart, for the man is Buck McQuillan.

"Good-evenin', Dr. Conway! We've met again, it seems; jest as I said we would. Air you ready for me? Who is that you have got with you? a body-guard? You see, I don't carry none; but I'm ready for you, all the same."

"What will you have, Mr. McQuillan? This gentleman is Houston Ludwig, who happened to overtake me on my way to see a sick patient, who may be dying now for need of me. *That* is my business—have you any?"

"Yes; I have—'bundance; and I'm a-tryin' now, the best of my 'bility, to discharge it. My business now is to git even with you, confounded sneak as you air! Where's your arms? I know you've got 'em. Out with your pistol, if you've got any man's grit in yer gizzard, and we'll have a fair fight, with Ludwig, here, fur a witness!"

"I do not carry arms, nor have I any, now. Goodness! man, have you not a spark of sense or prudence left? Let me pass, and do you go home and go to bed, like any other sensible person."

"Sense! Prudence! Go to bed! I say! When this was to have been my wedding-night, and my poor gal not spoke to me, not seen me, sence—you know when. And she jest a-layin' on her bed and a-moanin' her life out; and you talk to *me* about being sensible. I've give you fair warnin', Dr. Conway; if you hain't arms, it ain't my fault—here goes!"

A flash of fire, a quick, cruel report in the crisp night-air, and the Doctor falls heavily from his horse, on the side away from his assailant—falls too quickly, it would seem, for the deadly missile to have reached him. Buck waited a moment to see if he would get up. The faithful sorrel had leaped to one side at the pistol-flash, but he now stood still beside his prostrate master.

"Hope I made a hole clean through his chicken heart," said Buck, as he galloped off into the woods.

"Help! Murder!" shouted Houston.

"Hush, boy! Don't raise an alarm. I am not hurt much. I only fell off to deceive him and get him to leave me. Come; help me a little."

"But, Doctor, the man ought to be caught."

"I don't want him caught—would n't have him caught for anything, on no account."

"I don't understand; he—"

"It is this way, then. He has been annoying me for some time; but, now that he thinks he has killed me, he will be out of the country before morning, and I shall be rid of him."

Houston argued the question no further, but he thought it a peculiar view to take of being shot at.

"Where are you hit, Doctor; anywheres?"

"The ball struck my side, but I think it only grazed the flesh. It has almost stopped bleeding now. Here; roll my handkerchief into a wad—that will stop it. Now, help me to get on my horse, and let us move away from here before some one comes."

They remounted and retraced their steps towards town. Dr. Conway thought it prudent to go home and dress his wound; and as for Houston, he had had enough "lark" for one night.

"My patient must get on without me, to-night; no matter; I guess it is nothing serious, anyway."

"He or she must 'a improved awful fast, then. You said a minute ago they was a-dyin' for want of you. Well, what is it all about, Doctor?"

"Ludwig, if you will promise to hold your tongue about it, I'll tell you the whole affair. You are almost a man now, and, perhaps—well, that fellow, McQuillan, was engaged to marry Agnes Vinson—you know the girl; and—"

"Hold on, Doctor! Do I understand you as holding of me bound to keep secret what you are a-going to tell me? If so, I 'd ruther you would n't tell it to me, because something might turn up so it would not be easy for me to keep mum. If you tell me, you must let me use my own judgment about it. I won't be bound by no promise."

The Doctor was silent a moment; then he continued:

"Well, as you say; I must let you exercise your own judgment, but I hope I can trust you not to give publicity to this affair. When you are made acquainted with all the circumstances, you will perceive that I am comparatively blameless, though I acknowledge I was somewhat wrong in the beginning. You see, the girl's grandmother was sick, and I was out there a good deal; just to pass the time, I used to carry on with her some, because I saw it pleased her—any fellow would have done the same. I never thought of her being so simple as to expect anything to come of it. But she did; and on the strength of it, refused to marry Buck McQuillan; and the fool holds me responsible for that. I took no notice of his threats, because I did not wish any noise made over it, on the girl's own account; it would be calculated to injure her, in her station of life. Of course it would n't affect me; but she is a woman, if she *is* a fool, and that is why I want this whole thing kept quiet. Now, if you will say nothing to contradict it, I will cause it to appear, that by accident I exploded a pistol in my pocket, and made this scratch in my side, and no one need be any wiser."

Dr. Conway's face did not look as honest as his words sounded, but Houston could not tell that in the moonlight. He felt, however, that the man's statements were warped, and was more than ever disinclined to be a partner with him in concealing the strange adventures of that Christmas night. He answered, dryly:

"Well, Doctor, I sha'n't falsify anything you choose to tell about it, unless I feel 'bleeged to, but you must n't call on me to tell it your way. I ain't very good myself, but I 've never made a practice of tellin' fibs."

The Doctor bit his lips in anger at the boy's insinuation; but he had stooped to deceit, and he could not complain if this stripling vaunted his honesty over him.

They had now reached Mrs. Brown's. Houston assisted the Doctor to put away his horse, and, at his request, went upstairs with him. Just as they entered the upper hall, Bob Dean opened his door and looked out. He was wakeful, and hearing them enter the barnyard gate, went to the window in time to see the two ride to the stable. In the moonlight he recognized Houston, and immediately came to the conclusion that some of his family were ill, and he in quest of medical aid. But when Bob appeared on the scene, Houston quickly vanished down the stairway, hoping he had not been recognized in the dim light of the hall. Bob, seeing his purpose to conceal his identity, said nothing to the Doctor about him, but made a friendly remark on the subject of the onerous nature of the professional labor, which robbed the night of its allotted rest-time; he furthermore mentioned his own restlessness, and was about to return to his room, when the Doctor addressed him:

"Please come into my room a little while, Dean."

Lighting a lamp, he seated Bob and himself, and proceeded to give a hasty statement of the night's doings, according to *his* view, and closed by asking Bob to take an instrument and probe the wound, to ascertain certainly the extent of damage he had so carelessly inflicted on himself. They found it slight; and after doing all necessary for the Doctor's comfort, Bob left him to sleep as best he could, and sought his own pillow again. But he expressed his opinion before he went to sleep.

"I don't believe a word of his doing it himself. The ball did not enter in the right way for that. There is some mystery about it; and if I don't get to the bottom of it, *I am mistaken.*"

CHAPTER XIX.

A LETTER RECEIVED.

DR. CONWAY deemed it prudent to keep his bed next morning; both that his wound might begin to heal without interruption, and that his "dear five hundred friends" might have time to wonder and be done wondering. He had managed, he thought, to give a pretty lucid account of the accident to Bob Dean. But it was late at night, and he might naturally be expected to be a trifle excited. He much preferred that some one else should give the statement to the world. So he stayed in bed.

It was to a surprised and questioning party, at the breakfast-table, next morning, that Bob gave the Doctor's version of his accident. He could see, at a glance, that Mrs. Brown did not more than half-way credit it. Jennie lost her appetite and color over the account, and Mr. Brown thought the "Doctor was uncommon keerless, to be a-shootin' of hisself." Mrs. Dean expressed unmitigated regret, and volunteered as nurse *pro tem.*

"He will not need much nursing, as he is in no danger whatever; but perhaps he will be glad of company. Miss Jennie, I shall look to you to see he does not get lonely."

"I do not believe I have enlisted into your corps of nurses, Mr. Surgeon! Perhaps I shall find some more diverting occupation during the holidays, than humoring a would-be invalid."

She had rallied her spirits, and was anxious not to show any solicitude.

"Mrs. Brown, do you rebel, too? It will never do to leave him to mother's tender mercies; she would soon spoil him."

"I guess Dr. Conway will not suffer for attention in *this* house, though he deserves to, for his carelessness."

On his way to Sabbath-school, Bob called at Mrs. Lipscomb's to tell them the news, and inquire about the invalid's health. He wanted to be the first to tell of the Doctor's accident at that house; not to see its effect on Mary—for he fain would have spared himself the grief of seeing her pained—but that no one else should see it, and find out more than she would like to have known. He had fallen into the habit of dropping in every morning, on his way to school—he called it on his way, but it was at least four blocks in the other direction.

Since he had tied the severed artery for her, Mrs. Lipscomb fancied no one else understood her case so well, or could minister to her comfort as could Bob. The Doctor had continued to lose ground in her favor, until now she could hardly tolerate him; and, after the fashion of sick folk, she made no great effort to conceal the fact. Dr. Conway would laugh and humor the fancy, but he did not like it any too well, for all that. Many pleasant hours had she and Mary spent with Bob beside the sick-bed, where, for her sake, all unpleasant topics were banished, and the conversation allowed to run in pleasant channels only. Bob's social qualities had been allowed free play, and had even developed new powers under the genial influence; so he had been led to say to himself, upon leaving them after one of these occasions, that he was grateful for this much happiness in Mary's presence, even if fate should shut him out for the future.

Mary met him at the door with a cheerful "Good-morning, Mr. Dean!" and her eyes and voice said he was welcome, as

well as did the outstretched hand. He took possession of this—he never missed an opportunity to touch it, but refrained from any tender demonstrations therewith, for fear of forfeiting the privilege.

"I need not ask how your mother is this morning, since *you* are looking better than I have seen you for a long time."

"Yes; *your* mother charmed her out of herself last night, and she rested splendidly, and feels quite strong this morning. She is only waiting for somebody's authority to get up and sit in her rocking-chair."

"Whose will she think sufficient to warrant so desperate a movement?" Bob asked, as he exchanged greetings with Mrs. Lipscomb.

"The Doctor's, I suppose; or yours," she added, laughing, as her mother made a wry face at suggestion of Dr. Conway holding any authority over her.

"I am not waiting for anybody's leave, but only till I should have my breakfast, and Mary had time to help me dress," said Mrs. Lipscomb.

After a little pause, during which Bob's face took on a shade of gravity, he said: "It is well so, unless I could give the permission; Dr. Conway is not able to come here this morning. He got himself shot last night."

"Got shot!" ejaculated Mrs. Lipscomb, looking anxiously at Mary, whom Bob was already watching for the effects of his sudden announcement.

She felt the blood leave her face, and then rush painfully back, but she could not tell whether it was because of fear for Dr. Conway, or because she knew Bob *was* watching her for the effects of his words.

He hastened to explain and assure them of the Doctor's safety, giving, as nearly as he could, the circumstances as

related by himself. Now here appeared a great contrast in the reception of this information, by these two families who had heard it. Mrs. Lipscomb and Mary seemed both to believe implicitly the victim's statement, while the Browns had, like himself, doubted. Was it because the Lipscombs loved him better, or that the Browns knew him best?

As he was about to leave them, Clarence Vaughn came in, bringing a letter, which he gave to Mary, saying, "Mr. Videll called me as I was coming by the post-office, and asked me to step in, and hand this to you."

She glanced at the address, then closed her hand over it, saying, "Thank you," while a red current mantled her whole face and neck. She knew Dr. Conway's writing, and could suspect the subject on which the missive would be indited.

"Mr. Dean, are you going to Sabbath-school this morning?" asked Clarence.

"I am, and shall be glad of your company. It is time we were off, too. Good day, ladies! Mrs. Lipscomb, I hope you will feel no worse for sitting up."

The fair sunshine of yesterday had given way to sombre clouds, and there blew a gusty wind from the south-west; but the congregation at church was good, the services of the day edifying, and they dispersed with kind feeling between man and his neighbor—and doubtless a degree of gratitude for the Sabbath day.

Bob had to answer many questions about the Doctor's welfare, for news of his misfortune had gotten abroad.

When the congregation was nearly out, Bob touched Houston Ludwig upon the shoulder, as he was about to pass.

"You had a late ride last night, my boy?"

No answer but a startled look, smothered into a wink and grimace.

"I want to see you this afternoon, Houston. Can't you come to my room for half an hour?"

Houston saw now that Bob had some clew to the night's proceedings, and, as he had stated to Dr. Conway, it was not his policy to tell fibs, or make use of subterfuges to get himself out of "scrapes." He was frequently caught in such, but usually came off lightly, by making a bold front out. He now gave Bob a knowing look and answered with his peculiar drawl:

"Well, Mr. Dean, I 'd *leetle* ruther not."

"But I would rather you should— come, my boy, are we not friends? What do you fear from me?"

"That 's so," responded the lad. "I reckon I had as well make a clean breast, fust as last; so all right. What time shall I come?"

"Well, say two o'clock."

"*All* right. But, see here, Mr. Dean; I 'd ruther Dr. Conway should n't know I 'd been a-talkin' to you. It 's his concern—not mine. True, I did n't promise nothin'; but then—"

"I understand, Houston. It is not necessary he should know. Still, it matters little what *he* thinks. I feel sure you have done nothing you need be afraid or ashamed to tell *me*."

"Well, that 's partly so, and partly not so; but I 'll tell you all about it this evenin'. I am glad I did n't promise him anything, anyhow."

"So am I glad. I should not like *him* to hold any bond upon *my* conscience," and contempt for the man appeared in Bob's voice, more than he had any idea of.

On reaching home, he went immediately in to see the Doctor. He found him restless, a little feverish, and ill at ease.

"How are we by this time?" said Bob, laying his cool hand on the sick man's brow.

"Not doing well—confound it all!—nor likely to be, with my brain in a rack. That I should be laid up in bed just now is dog's luck!"

"Well, my dear sir, I have never seen the time that *was* just the time to be sick. Yet, we must all submit at some time to be sick, and to die. But a sick man is not a choice subject for a homily on patience; so I will desist. Is there anything I can do for you, Doctor? I mean besides dress your wound and minister to the man physical?"

"Besides that?"

"You spoke of a mind in a rack; thought, perhaps, I could serve you by attending to any little matter; anything I can do, I will, with pleasure."

Bob had opened the way for confidence, if the Doctor was so inclined; and the latter understood him, and wondered if he had found out anything. But he concluded to risk matters to take their course; or, at least, not to precipitate any developments by premature confessions. He did not count on Bob's influence on the mind of Houston—in fact, if he had thought of it at all he would surely have expected the boy to confide in any one else, sooner, judging by his eagerness the night before to conceal his identity; and, likewise, arguing from his knowledge of boys in general, and his own boyhood in particular, he thought the teacher about the last person who would receive this boy's confidence. He only half knew Bob Dean—knew nothing of the power of his master-will, when he chose to use it; knew nothing of his skill, by simple honesty and kindness, in drawing hearts to himself, whether he willed it or not. While a sneer curled his thin lip, Dr. Conway answered:

"No one else can attend to my personal affairs, and I don't feel myself in the extremity yet to need a *confessor*."

"Beg pardon, sir, for the suggestion," returned Bob, while his wounded pride flamed in color on his strong face.

He finished attending to the man's personal needs as tenderly as if he had not been insulted by him—too generous to take advantage of his condition to revenge the indignity; but a compression on the wide mouth, and a gleam in the gray eyes, warned Dr. Conway to bridle his taunting speech in the future. When he finished his work, he simply remarked, "I think that will do," and left him, without responding to the Doctor's "Thank you!"

Houston Ludwig was punctual to appointment; he knocked at Bob's door just as that gentleman was beginning to wonder if he would fail to come. But, evidently, he did not relish the proposed interview, and glanced uneasily at the Doctor's shut door.

He made, as he had said he would, "a clean breast," and felt, in a measure, relieved, as if he had transferred the responsibility of Dr. Conway's secret to the conscience of another. Nor did Bob feel that he was doing anything dishonorable in receiving it. He knew there was some mystery about the night's transactions, and he had all reason to believe Houston was implicated in it. He knew, furthermore, that the Doctor's principles would not stand in the way of throwing all unpleasant consequences on the boy's head, should such arise; and he, with the ignorance of youth, would not be able to meet them. Houston was the eldest son of very poor parents; the father an imbecile, the mother an anxious, over-worked woman, who had earnestly begged Mr. Dean to look after her boy, already too inclined to seek idle company.

"Well, Houston," said Bob, their conference finished, "I

am glad you did not get to carry out your plans last night, for they might have led you into regrets deeper than that of being the only witness to the incidents you have confided to me. I was sure, all the while, that Dr. Conway's statement was manufactured for the occasion; you were right in not promising him your aid in making it public. Still, I believe it best you should tell no one else, unless it becomes necessary. I hope we can do something to set right these crooked things. I may need your help further—can I depend on you?"

"Yes, sir-*ree*, Mr. Dean, you can. Anything I can do I'll be glad to—I 'm already glad you worked the truth outen me, for I could n't sleep a wink last night for thinking about it. Now I don't feel so responsible like. Still, I ruther the Doctor should n't know I 'd been here."

"That is all safe—he shall not know, Houston."

Bob went out to see if the coast was clear, and then dismissed his uncomfortable young friend, who made his escape without meeting any one.

Bob consulted his fire awhile about the facts which had come to his knowledge; then tapping at his mother's door, went in, and seating himself on the side of the bed in which she was resting, they had a long, confidential chat. He told her all he knew, for she was to be his confederate in unravelling the tangled skein of secresy and guilt. We will not forestall their plans, laid this hour, but let them work them out.

Bob went down to Mr. Brown's room, and inquired for him.

"He has gone out, Mr. Dean; is there anything I can do for you?" inquired Mrs. Brown, putting on her slippers, and smoothing her hair with the palm of her hand. She too had been resting, after the fatigue of church-going; she always

complained that "going to church tired her worse than work."

"Did Mr. Brown ride?" asked Bob.

"Oh, no; he only went down town a little while ago. He 'll be back soon, I guess."

"That 's all I want to know. I wish to take a little ride this afternoon, and would like to get Button, if you are not going to use him."

"Certainly, you can have him. Going alone?" she asked, with curiosity.

"Yes, ma'am. You know I don't often take pleasure rides on Sunday; but this one is not altogether for pleasure. I am much obliged. I will get him from the stable;" and Bob smiled and went out.

"I 'll be bound it is for somebody's pleasure. I don't believe he ever thinks about his own. I do wonder what he *is* up to. I must go look after Mrs. Dean. She 'll be lonesome if he goes out. And the Doctor, too—I declare, I wish I did know the straight of some things. Never mind."

CHAPTER XX.

A LETTER READ AND ANSWERED.

AFTER Bob Dean and Clarence Vaughn left for church, Mary stole away to her own little room to read that letter.

Standing by the window, she held it unopened, and looked at the superscription, much as one in a dream; her face white

and her eyes dilated with expectancy, knowing not what to hope, or what to fear in its hidden lines.

Reader, have you never held a letter thus, feeling that

> "Even now the steps of fate
> Are at the threshold"?

Was it in love, or anger? Did it hold tones of tenderness that would set the thrilled chords of her being in answering throes, which would be bitter work to still? Or would it be cold, like his manner of late, disclaiming the fond pleas of the past? She almost hoped the latter; 't would be easier to bear—and then she did not hope it, for 't would be sweet to hear, once more, that he loved her—sweet to carry the tender chimes through her lonely life.

A saucy robin perched himself on the rose arbor outside the window, and perked his head on one side as he looked at her. Everything appeared as usual in the little back yard, just as if she were not holding in her hand, unread, her first love letter—and her last, it would be, too. Now she breaks the seal, and scans it over—not reads; she must wait for more time for that; her house work is not done yet.

It is in love—ah! ah! such love!

She puts it from her, into the little table drawer, and goes out to the kitchen where Laura is—people do eat and live on in an everyday fashion, even while such letters lie with burning words in little table drawers.

The girl has finished her cleaning, and is awaiting orders for dinner. Mary had taken time and pains to teach the mute to read and write, and was able, by means of the little slate she had provided for her, to converse easily with her. Taking the slate she wrote:

"It is Christmas, and Sabbath, Laura, and your sister is

sick at home; as my mother feels much better to-day, I can spare you and I will get dinner. You may spend the day at home, but come back before night."

"Thank you, ma'am; I shall be glad to, if you are sure you don't need me." She was about to hand Mary the slate, then seemed to have another thought, for she added, "Is there anything the matter, Miss Mary?" and she looked up into the intense, dark eyes of her mistress.

"Nothing that you can help, my little friend. Good-bye."

Laura went out without further remark, but she had formed a pretty clear idea that Dr. Conway had something to do with Miss Mary's looks. She had seen her receive the letter, and, with her quick perception, had long ago observed that anything pertaining to the Doctor was apt to make Mary serious. Poor child! she drew a sigh, and came to the sage conclusion that there was little else but trouble in this world of ours.

Mary next went to her mother's room, and proffered to dress her. Mrs. Lipscomb looked fondly at her a moment, then answered:

"I believe I will wait till after my nap, darling. Bring me my Bible to read, and then do you go and rest in your room, before you have to get dinner ready."

"Yes, mother."

She understood what thoughts had prompted the suggestion; and while the love-motive was very precious, she was not ready yet to talk to her about it.

Shut in again in her own room, she draws the letter from its hiding-place; but, with a sudden impulse, lays her head down on the little table to think. She wants to take one more look at things as they are, before this new message changes their coloring with its passionate breath. Presently

the thought grows to be a prayer; then, much as a man long inebriated resolves to reform, and, knowing his weakness, would push temptation beyond his reach, she steels her heart against its tenderness, and reads as if it had been addressed to another, and she had no part in it. Reads, that she may be able to answer it. And now, strange! strange! viewed in this outside light, as having no connection with herself, it begins to seem a very weak letter, and (she has to confess it) as if its author had studied the effect, and had striven to write a model love-letter. Without a doubt, that "other one" had penned this letter, and it would not be very hard to answer *him*.

Without giving her heart time to stir rebellious protests, she writes the answer: Thanks him for the honor he has conferred on her; sorely regrets that she must give him pain—hers, in inflicting it, can scarce be less than his; prays he will forgive, if her conduct in the past has given him just reason to expect a different answer; but begs to assure him that coquetry has no place in her character, and hopes his charity will suggest a kinder reason for her seeming inconsistency. Lest he might not understand this answer to be final, she would state that her mother was altogether unwilling they should ever occupy a nearer relation than at present. She stopped to consider how she should answer the passage wherein he placed his future for weal or woe in her keeping.

"That is simple nonsense; and he knows it, and does not mean what he says. I will not mention it."

The pen lingers over the beginning of the next paragraph, making no progress.

"No; I can't say I hope him much happiness in the future; nor can I ask him to be my friend. Oh, my love! my love! you are gone from me forever!"

Such a sinking at her heart, such a tightening about her throat, but no tears—she is too strong for that this morning. She simply signs,

"With due respect,

MARY LIPSCOMB."

Put in the envelope, she raises it to her lips to seal, when, like one who shrinks from closing the coffin-lid over the beloved dead, she replaces it unsealed in the drawer, feeling less alone with it thus. She cannot go to her mother yet, thinking, while she chides herself for the thought, that the demand at the filial altar has been a heavy one. Yet, yet, she knows, in the secret chamber of her heart, that not alone because of her mother had she told him nay; that there was another, a subtler, reason, that she recognized but could not name, prompting her to take her heart away from one who coveted but would not cherish it. Still, it was none the less a widowed heart she had left to her; for, had she not loved and lost? and was now alone, all alone, forever alone.

She went to the kitchen and made the dinner ready before she returned to Mrs. Lipscomb.

"Mother, shall I bring your dinner to you in bed, or shall I dress you first?"

"Is the dinner ready now?"

"Yes, ma'am, nearly. But it can wait. Please let me dress you first, and you will sit in your chair by the table, and we will eat together."

"Very well."

This toilet was a glad and tender work for Mary to-day. She thought, while she brushed the dear gray hair, of the times she had feared it would be put out of her sight forever. She was thankful she had been able to make a sacrifice—that no wilfulness of hers had added a shade to its silver hue.

The happy service completed, she set their dinner on a round table before the fire.

"Here are some nice birds Houston Ludwig brought you yesterday."

"They look nice! I wonder he thought of bringing them, though. It seems like everybody is kind to me."

"I don't think the idea originated with him; as he was coming in from shooting he met Mr. Dean, who asked him if he did n't think half-a-dozen partridges, nicely dressed, would be a clever Christmas gift to you. Houston assured me that, while the birds were his, the credit of the gift belonged to Mr. Dean."

"It is just like him. He never forgets anything that it will do good to remember."

"I thought he looked troubled this morning, mother. I was surprised, as his mother had just come, and he anticipated so much pleasure from her visit."

"It was nothing about her that troubled him, you may be sure. I think it might have been in connection with Dr. Conway's accident."

Mary changed color slightly at mention of the name, but spoke quietly:

"That was certainly a narrow escape. Strange that it should have so happened. I do not see why he should carry a pistol in his pocket."

"For protection, during his night rides, I presume."

"But it seems he is his own worst enemy."

"Nor is he dangerous to himself alone; than which was never a truer truth spoken."

Mary looked at her mother, surprised at her earnestness. Now that the subject was open, better get over the dread barrier, and tell her that the die had been cast.

"The letter I got this morning was from him, mother. He asked me to marry him, and I have answered him no, and now the matter is settled."

No quiver in the sweet voice, only a husky tone; and she rises to clear the table and take the remainder of the dinner out. Mrs. Lipscomb does not speak until she is done, and comes in without her great apron, and her dress tidied for the afternoon.

"Come here, my precious child."

She draws her down on the rug in front of her, and putting a hand on each side of her face, kisses her fair brow between the true, deep eyes, saying:

"God will bless you, dutiful, noble daughter, that you are. In the future you will not regret that you listened to the warning of your mother, to whom long life and knowledge of human hearts has given a keener sight than to these trusting eyes. *He will not do to trust.* God has surely made a better man for my pretty child."

"There will never be any other, better nor worse. I shall be yours only now, always."

"We shall see—it is natural you should feel so now."

A rattle at the door-latch announced that Laura had returned, and made her presence known thus before entering.

She came to the fire shivering, though the day was not cold. Her fingers worked nervously at the fringe of her shawl and her face was full of suppressed excitement. She handed Mary her slate.

"You are back in good time, Laura. How is your sister?"

"She is bad, bad!"

"Then you need not have come back. Do they need help in nursing her?"

"No, ma'am. Her body is not sick; it is her mind."

"What troubles her mind, Laura?"

"Ah! Miss Mary, they say I must not tell! but I shall tell you, for are not you my friend? my best friend! Dr. Conway has broken her heart."

"Dr. Conway! Broken her heart! What do you mean?"

"It is true. She was to have married Buck McQuillan last night, but Dr. Conway came and stole her heart, and then he left her. I saw how it would be, long time ago, and begged her not to trust him; but she said he was handsome and good, and loved her true, if she was ignorant and poor; and he had promised to marry her and would make her a fine lady. But when grandma died, he denied it, and said she was a fool for thinking such a thing, and then he and Buck quarrelled. But she would not marry Buck, and so last night Buck met him and just shot him dead, and then run off and left his poor old father and mother and sisters. And now Aggie is nearly crazy—says she is the cause of the Doctor's death, and been the ruin of Buck, who was always so good to her. Oh, we are so miserable, Miss Mary! there is nothing but trouble in the world."

She had rapidly scribbled down her story, with her slate resting on her knee, as she crouched on the floor before the fire.

Mary read the words as they were written. Her first thought was to comfort the distressed child. She wrote:

"Dr. Conway is not dead. He is only slightly wounded, and will soon get well, and Buck can come back. Besides, no one knows he did it, for the Doctor says he shot himself."

The mute raised her wild eyes to Mary's face a moment in wonder, then, as the truth gradually dawned upon her perturbed mind, she wrote:

"That is to keep *somebody* he wants to make like him, from

knowing why Buck shot him, and how he treated poor Aggie. Oh, he is bad! so bad! I hate him!"

"Sh! don't say that. Yes, he is bad. I did not know how bad before." Mary's face showed her indignation. Laura looked curiously at her, as she continued. "Go to the kitchen and get your dinner, then come to me—I want you to go an errand."

Mary explained to her mother what had been communicated on the little slate, but they passed no comments on the turpitude of Dr. Conway's conduct.

Soon she went to her room, and took out the letter she had written him. She remembered how she had felt about sealing it, and realized that the opening of it was like raising, too late, the kindly coffin-lid over the beloved dead, whose features, a little ago, only cold and white, but still dear, are now but horrible corruption, altogether unlike the loved and lost!

Oh! could it be true, he was only a common scoundrel, a heartless knave, a very liar! Her lover—her Duval Conway, whom she had deemed peerless among his kind. Truly, her pride had been humbled. She despised herself, that she had not despised him.

She unfolded the dainty sheet and added a postscript:

"3 P. M.

"SIR:—I have just learned, through a member of the wronged family, the true circumstances of your accident, and the motive cause. Out of respect to the injured girl I will not divulge it, nor will my informant tell it to any one else, but I wish you to know that it altogether changes the respect and sympathy which I have expressed in the body of my letter. Permit me to say, that I can conceive of no extenuating circumstances which could warrant such a course

of duplicity as that in which you have enveloped yourself. You will acknowledge I have a right to subscribe myself,

"Indignantly, M. L."

She had just sealed the missive, when Laura presented herself again.

"I wish you to take this letter to Mrs. Brown's, and give it to Dr. Conway himself — I mean, do not give it to anyone else, if you can help it."

The girl stood a moment and fingered the letter, then seizing the slate, wrote:

"Miss Mary, has n't he been trying to get you to love him, too? Please don't do it. He will make you sorry, too, like Aggie."

Mary struggled with her sensitiveness, which shrank from revealing her heart affairs to her little servant, but she believed that, under the pain she was bearing, the child was old enough in sorrow to appreciate and keep sacred her confidence. So she answered her question.

"He wrote to ask me to marry him; but I have told him no."

"I am so glad! Now his wicked heart will hurt like Aggie's does—if he has any," she added.

Mary wondered, too, what manner of heart it was that he carried in that broad bosom; but she did believe he had loved her once.

"Laura, you will remember that this is my affair, and not to be told to your sister, or any one else."

The child seized her hand, and, kissing it, pressed it to her heart.

Her mistress understood her, and knew she would be faithful.

CHAPTER XXI.

GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF IT.

BOB DEAN'S ride this Sabbath afternoon takes him in the same direction, but not to the same place, he had happened upon more than a month ago, when he first came into possession of the clew to Dr. Conway's labyrinthian affairs; and this clew Bob is now tracing, trying to "get to the bottom of it," as he had expressed himself—not from idle curiosity, nor in officiousness; but if perhaps he may be able to "straighten some crooked ways."

He was fond of walking, and in the course of his numerous rambles had made himself acquainted with all the roads, and most of the people, within three miles of C——. So he was at no loss to find his destination to-day.

He dismounted near a little "box house," which boasted the dimension of front-room, shed-room, and porch. The establishment was innocent of yard fence, and altogether wore a comfortless, deserted look. That it was inhabited was attested by the remnant of last week's wash, which, not being needed for present wear, was left hanging on the hawbushes, in lieu of better receptacle. A fat pig was investigating a puddle of slop under the "shed-room" window, which room, by that sign, we know to be the kitchen; and a few contented hens contemplated, with satisfaction, their new home, which, let us explain, consisted of a row of boxes, fastened between adjacent trees, whose friendly branches furnished bed-rooms also.

As Bob entered the porch, he was met by an elderly man of—let us say sixty years. Though stooping half double, and

with thin white hair, his brown face was shining and free from wrinkles, while a peculiar, sharp physiognomy was suggestive of a terrapin. His faded blue eyes looked anxiously at the visitor, and suspiciously past him down the road. He removed a short black pipe from his mouth as he spoke:

"Good-evenin', Mr. Dean. Come in an' hev a cheer. Maw, heer 's Mr. Dean. I do' know as you 's seed her afore; that 's my ole 'oman, Mr. Dean."

Bob shook hands with him and the "ole 'oman," who, with a handkerchief tied over her ears, was sitting on the hearth, convenient to the embers with which she frequently replenished the fire in *her* pipe, by dipping it into the ashes, and pressing the coal thus fished up with the forefinger of her wrinkled hand, emitting a series of explosive puffs from her blackened lips.

"Well, Mrs. McQuillan, your fire feels pleasant after riding. It is a little raw this afternoon."

"Yes, sir; it *is*. We gwine to hev some mo' fallin' weather agin, 'fore long, in my uppinion."

"Yesterday was a beautiful day. I do not think I ever saw a finer."

"Mighty putty; but I 've heerd say it was onlucky to see Chrismus day so warm an' shiny," and she shook her head dolefully.

"'A green Yule makes a fat churchyard,'" quoted Bob, to justify her foreboding.

"Well, 't ain't to say green any now, but it *hes* been oncommon warm. Yistiddy was 'most too warm fur fire to feel good," she said, by way of keeping up the talk.

"Yes; quite too warm for fire," assented Bob, for the same reason.

"Well, *my* fire hain't been out fur forty years, 'cept when

we bin on the move," and she indulged in a fresh coal of the pedigreed (?) article.

"Well, Mr. McQuillan, have your young folks left you all alone to-day?"

"Seems so. The gyells went over to Miss Vinson's this morning, an' they hain't come back yit."

"And where is Buck?"

The old couple exchanged quick, significant glances, and, without looking at Bob, the man answered:

"He 's rid off some'rs. I don't know where."

Bob heartily pitied the poor parents, and scarcely knew how to approach the subject which he had come to discuss.

After a pause, Mr. McQuillan asked:

"Any news 'bout town to-day? I did n't git out ter meetin', my rheumatiz is so bad these times."

"Well, yes; a little—unless you have heard it; in which case I suppose you could not call it news. Dr. Conway was shot last night."

"Shot! You don't say so! Well, well," and the old man turned uneasily in his chair, while the woman was seized with a fit of coughing, which compelled her to avert her face quite away from Bob. But she recovered and asked:

"Did you say he was *dead?*"

"Oh, no; nor likely to die; he is but slightly hurt."

"Thank the Lord fur that!" she cried; and the poor old face said that the thanksgiving was from her troubled heart.

"Amen! We should always thank the Lord when a wicked man is spared from death," responded Bob.

"Weeked you may say, sir; fur that 'ar man is orful weeked; he is. May God forgive him."

Bob yearned to say something to comfort the poor creature, who was trembling in her excitement and apprehen-

sion, but feared to ask the question which her husband now put:

"You did n't hear how it happened, did you, Mr. Dean?—who done the deed?"

"Dr. Conway says he shot *himself* with a pistol in his pocket, which accidentally exploded."

Bob spoke slowly, carefully measuring his words, and noting their effect.

The mother caught her breath quickly.

"Shot *hisself!* You don't say so! Well, I never!"

She could not conceal how great was the relief this version of the affair gave to her strained feelings. Buck's father spoke.

"Now, come to think of it, that 's ruther more 'n likely; fur the Doctor, he 's a kinder keerless man, which way you take him; he don't take no keer of hisself. Fur me, I don't see what anybody wants to be a-kerryin' them thar pistols fur, nohow. They 's dangerous."

"Yes; they do harm," responded Bob, still at a loss how to bring forward the truth.

He saw that they were more than willing the Doctor's version should remain current, and would, of their own accord, betray nothing which would open the way for mutual confidence; he concluded to waste no more time in manœuvring, but to plunge into the open truth.

The old people were expending their wonderment in fancying all the attending circumstances of the accident with a flimsy disguise of ignorance. They had drawn their chairs together, and were stooping over the fire to conceal the consciousness of guilt which mingled with the trouble in their aged faces. Bob arose, and, approaching, laid a kindly hand on the shoulder of each, saying, in his grave, earnest tone:

"Good friends, that is the way Dr. Conway *said* it happened.

But *I know the true facts* as well as you do, and have come out here to talk to you about it—"

They tried to interrupt him with protestations of ignorance, but he raised his hand for silence, and continued:

"Now, I am your friend, and *Buck's* friend, and I want to see it all made right. You can see Dr. Conway does not want to accriminate him—and he had better not; for, while the crime is Buck's, the disgrace is his. Buck has gone off from home, which was well; but you know where he is, and can send for him. Now, this is what I propose: If Buck will give me an obligation to let this matter drop, and never any more try to harm his enemy, I will be his security that nothing shall be done against him. Now, what do you say, friends?"

The mother had broken down into tears ere he was done speaking, while the father cleared his throat, and wiped his hard hand across his eyes, patting his foot, and swaying to and fro in a determined effort not to give way. But when his wife laid her poor, claw-like hand on his knee, muttering, "Let 's try to git it done, pa, and bring poor Buck home," he buried his face in his hands, and seemed to be trying to think it out.

Bob stood patiently waiting, his heart aching in sympathy with theirs. Finally the old man spoke:

"Well, sir, ef ye know, 't ain't no use fur us to deny it. Buck, he come home las' night a'ter midnight, and telled us 'bout it; he said he 'd killed him, and war n't going to deny it, and was bound to light out o' the country. We sot and talked it over, and jest 'fore the chickens crowed fur day, he went off. Pore feller! he 's been nigh 'bout distracted here of late, and don't rightly know what he *is* a doin'. I b'lieve he was sorry, soon as the deed was done, but he would n't own it."

"He said the man had destroyed his happiness, and Aggie's happiness, and he warn't gwine ter leave him here to destroy no more folks' happiness," sobbed Buck's mother.

"But it 's mighty hard on him to be runnin' from jestice, and a hidin' like a outlow, when we 've tried to raise him right, and he all our 'pendence in our ole age; and 'fore this, he 's always been honest, and kind-hearted, an' hard workin', and contented as the next one, an' no better son than him, nowhere's."

The old man gave way, at last, to the sobs which choked his utterance.

"Well, I hope, dear friends, we may be able to bring him home again, to comfort and care for you in your old age. Let us work together for that end."

"As you say, we do know whar he is to-day an' to-night, but we ha'nt nobody to send fur him, 'less I go myself, an' I can't see no count to ride of nights."

"Then I will send for him."

"But—"

"The person I shall send, is the only one besides ourselves who knows about it—the young man who saw the deed. He is my friend, and we can trust him."

"Well, how can we fix it up?"

"I will write him an explanation and send it by the young man, who will come to you in a short time for directions to find him. You must tell him so he will be sure to find him, even if he has started on."

"But, Mr. Dean," said the mother, "my pore boy can't read yo' writin'; he 's had to work all his life, an 's nuver had no chance for schoolin'."

"Is that so? Well then Houston shall read it to him, and take him a message, too."

"Reckin he won't think its jest some play-off to ketch him, an' go on faster'n ever?"

"Well, that might be—" Bob stood thinking a moment. "I will tell you what I will do. I will go myself if you will tell me where to find him. I know he will believe me when I tell him how it is."

"The Lord bless your kin' heart, Mr. Dean! to think of you a ridin' in the night a'ter him—and us nothin' to you—an' nuver done nothin' for you nuther."

"Friends, I have a mother that I love very dearly, and who has but one son, as you have, and she will be willing to have me go. I will bring her to see you when I come back. Now give me the directions, and I will go back to town and get another horse."

"Do you know how to go to Kolb's Bridge on the Brushy?"

"Houston will. I shall take him with me."

"Well, you go thar, an' inquire for Abe Miller's. When you git thar, they 'll tell ye how to go to Simon Miller's, an' thar ye'll find Buck, if he hain't left, which I don't think he has."

Bob had taken out his book and pencil and made a note of the names. When he had finished he extended his hand to the parents.

"Good-bye, until I see you again, happier, I hope."

"Oh, Mr. Dean, you ain't a foolin' of us, are you, to git the law hold of our Buck," cried the old woman, her suspicion taking fresh fright as she saw him about to go out of her sight.

"I am honest with you. You must trust me."

"I will, I will, an' God bless you."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ANSWER RECEIVED.

WHEN Laura Vinson got Mary's letter in her hand, she sped swiftly with it towards Mrs. Brown's. She was glad, so very glad, that Mary had allowed her to be its bearer, for it was to her an arrow of Nemesis. She gloatingly pictured to herself how he would look when he read it, and perhaps, never before, in her narrow life, had she so really longed for the gift of speech, that she might have the sweet satisfaction of taunting him in this, the coveted hour of revenge. She wondered very much what words Mary had used to convey her refusal; had the letter been the property of any other than her beloved mistress, her curiosity might have been too much for her honor, for it was but slightly sealed, and the mucilage was yet damp. When she reached the corner, she stopped where the Osage hedge sheltered her, and looked at the missive, just trying the seal a *little*. She could safely open and reseal it, without in the least damaging the envelope—should she? Mary had told her the contents, why should n't she feast her eyes on the words?

"No; if she had wanted me to see them she would have showed them to me. They are hers, not his, yet," and she hurried on out of the way of temptation.

"I am glad her honor bore the test," said Bob Dean, who had been watching her at a little distance. He was just returning from his interview with Buck's parents, and had seen the girl stop at the corner to examine the letter she carried, which Bob's heart told him was an answer to the one he had seen Mary receive in the morning. Bob had taken quite an

interest in Laura, partly on account of her affliction, but perhaps more because of the position she occupied in Mrs. Lipscomb's family, and the peculiar circumstances under which he had first met her. During Mrs. Lipscomb's illness he had begun to teach her the mute alphabet, which she acquired rapidly; they had grown to be good friends, and now he watched anxiously to see if the confidence he had placed in her integrity was to be sacrificed to Eve's weakness. But he was gratified by seeing her put the letter under her shawl, her face saying she had conquered, while at the same time it told of the eager interest she held in the missive.

Jennie Brown answered her rap at the door. Laura showed her the letter, swept her hand over her chin and chest, and pointed up-stairs, moving forward as if she would go up. Jennie reached for the letter, saying:

"I will send it to him."

But Laura shook her head, and drew her treasure under her shawl, while she again assayed the stair; but Jennie's hand was laid on her arm, and her black eyes flashed indignation, as she said:

"You must give it to me!"

Then Laura's blue orbs answered measure for measure, as she put her hand behind her under the shawl.

Their relative power of muscle might have been put to test here, had it not happened that Bob Dean chose that particular moment to enter. Before he could possess himself of the facts and causes before him, Jennie very sweetly said:

"Laura has brought a letter for Dr. Conway. Will you be so kind as to take it up to him?"

She was resolved that, since Laura was so set on carrying it herself, she should not do it, if *her* manœuvring could prevent it, even if it only passed into some one else's hands. But Bob

Dean had not the least desire to handle, or to be in any way connected with that particular letter. The whole subject was distasteful to him. Judging from her vivid flush at sight of the Doctor's communication in the morning, Mary's response could not be otherwise than most comforting to the invalid up-stairs. He needed comfort, certainly, for he had, and would have, many sources of anxiety; but Bob did not feel as merciful towards him as he might have done; and just now, it would have given him more animal gratification to tweak Dr. Conway's Grecian nose, than to convey him love-letters from the only woman in the world *he* coveted. So, motioning to Laura to go on up-stairs, he said to Jennie;

"I will see that he gets it."

He was not looking about him as sharply as usual, or he might have been puzzled at the gleam of triumph which glinted in the mute's eyes, the mingled anger and chagrin pictured in Jennie's usually merry countenance.

The latter turned into the now darkening parlor, and slammed the door behind her. Somebody has fitly called this act of slamming doors "wooden swearing;" and whether or not the term is always applicable to the mental state of the doer, it did not miss of fitting Jennie Brown's sentiments, as she stood still in the middle of the room, her little hands fiercely locked across her breast, straining her ears to catch sounds from above.

"Of course I can't hear through several walls and the floor and ceiling; and they won't talk anyhow—only make signs; oh, what *would n't I give to know* what is in that letter! If he is not more careful of it than of his other bits of property, *I will know!* 'All is fair in love and war,' and this is both. But then it may be too late. I wish mamma had told her about that Agnes Vinson; she promised me to do it, and

then let her soft heart overrule her judgment. But she *shall* know it, if I have to tell her myself, and tell her the reason, too. *Oh, I do love him so!* and I have thought lately that there was a coolness between him and Mary. But now she has written to him; and it is a private letter, too, or she would not have had that child be so particular about giving it to him; and she would not write to him unless she was engaged to him—Mary would n't, I mean; if it was me, or some other girl, 't would be different. Oh, dear! dear! I do have so much trouble about him. The first thing I know, there will be wrinkles all over my face,"—she felt of her smooth, rosy-brown cheeks—"and then I know he won't love me. I was in hopes Mr. Dean or his mother would help me some way, but I can't talk to either of them about him, without showing what a slave I am to my love for him."

She crouched down on the rug before the dying fire and burst into tears. Poor child! she had, all her sunny life, been accustomed to make playthings of human hearts, and was now feeling her first woes from the thrall of the tyrant, Love.

Bob and Laura went up-stairs together. He knocked at the Doctor's door, and Mrs. Brown, who had been sitting with the sick man, opened it for him. Motioning for Laura to enter, Bob turned and shut himself into his own room.

Laura, fearful of another contest over her precious missive, slipped in without showing it, and going directly up to Dr. Conway, lying, pale and handsome, back upon his pillows, she gave him the letter; then, as their eyes met, she made a wry face and laughed vindictively. As he read the address, she touched the end of her finger to her nose so slyly that Mrs. Brown did not see, then slipping out, ran down stairs and home again.

Dr. Conway did not open his letter immediately. How

could he, with Mrs. Brown sitting there reading his very thoughts with those sharp eyes of hers? The consciousness that he would not have her to know anything about the matters to which this innocent-looking letter pertained brought a guilty blush to his face. Let us be glad it was so, for "the man who blushes is not quite a brute."

He was not a little anxious, however, to know his verdict, for Laura's strange conduct had awakened apprehension in his mind, already nervous with suspense. When he dared look up at Mrs. Brown, she was studiously examining the pattern of the carpet, though she certainly must have been already familiar with the design. Her silence boded no good for the culprit (he felt himself such), and well he knew it. He must make an effort to divert her mind. Toying carelessly with the little envelope, he said:

"How is Miss Jennie enjoying the holidays? It seems an age since I saw her, whereas it was only yesterday. Do I look *too* horrible to have her come and see me a little while? You would not object, would you? I do not mean just now, but say after tea."

"I don't know whether she will come or not. She always does just as she pleases, as you very well know. I will tell her, and will leave you now to read your letter."

"Yes, just a business letter, I presume. Mrs. Lipscomb asked for my bill yesterday, and I sent it, and I should guess this to be the settlement."

He did not dare look up as he told the weak falsehood; but Mrs. Brown did not need he should, for her understanding of it.

"This is Sunday. Mrs. Lipscomb would scarcely attend to such business to-day," she answered, without trying to conceal the contempt for him which her voice made evident.

"Really, I forgot it *was* Sunday. All days are alike to such reprobates as myself," and he broke the seal and unfolded the white sheet, but weakly turned the signature out of Mrs. Brown's sight, as she went out.

He read it through with no word uttered, save a smothered oath at the close; turned and read it again—then lay still and hard on his pillow, the little sheet clutched tightly in his slender fingers, the pallor of death on his classic face, while the throbs of his heart quivered the cover lying over his chest.

"Great God in heaven! This is too much to bear. She might have made me good—but all is lost!"

Under like circumstances, individual men act very differently. Duval Conway loved Mary Lipscomb *just now*, as much as was in him to love anything besides himself. Some men, without the restraint of religion, would give themselves up unreservedly to the bad; but this man worships himself, and holds the comfort of his precious body paramount to all considerations. Let us see if he finds not some balm for his wounded love, and learns to endure life, even without this precious woman whom he has declared indispensable to his happiness.

"Jennie!"

Mrs. Brown opened the sitting-room door and peeped in, but no Jennie she found. She came to the parlor-door and did likewise, repeating the call.

"Jennie!"

"Ma'am." The answer came half-smothered from the cushion arm-chair, which, standing before the fireplace, was doing service for Miss Jennie to cry on. Her mother closed the door, then came up on tip-toe, saying:

"Don't be a little fool, child. He has got his answer from her now, one way or the other. It don't matter to us.

If it is 'no,' we are all right; and if it is 'yes,' I 'll break it up shortly. Don't you fret and go to making yourself ugly, and letting folks in the house see how silly you are about him. Hold up your head and show your pluck! I 'm ashamed of you! He wants you to go up to see him, after supper."

This last was uttered somewhat timidly, the pert, scolding tone all gone, for she was uncertain what effect the communication would have on her daughter, whose tact and sense of propriety were unexceptionable.

"I 'll not go a step! Wait till he wants me bad enough to do without getting his letters from somebody else."

She got up now, and tossed her curls defiantly—opposition was a sweet morsel to her feminine soul.

"Very well; do as you please."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RIDE IN THE NIGHT.

TEA is over at Mrs. Brown's, and Bob and his mother are standing together on the rug in front of the fire, in the latter's room. Bob's arm is around her waist, while her frail head leans back against his broad shoulder. The features of both wear a look of anxiety, with this difference—hers has a touch of self-denial, while his is chiefly of solicitude for her comfort.

"It is hard for me to let you go, my son, on such an errand. It is fraught with some danger as well as exposure—for the sky threatens rain; and it is a long, dreary ride. I am sorely tempted to say 'no,'" and she tip-toed and kissed his square chin.

"I am glad you are able to resist the temptation then, mother. My word is given, and there is no one else to do it. Much harm may be avoided by finding the man, and bringing him back, under promise to keep peace, before the crime becomes known. If he does not come home, the cause of his disappearance must eventually transpire, and not only will Agnes be ruined in reputation, but Dr. Conway's social standing must suffer, to say nothing of the trouble it will give Buck's own family. If he returns immediately we can silence the whole affair at once, and there will be an end of it, I hope. It seems to be my duty to try to accomplish it, since the circumstances have come to my knowledge in a manner almost providential."

"Bob, have you no motive in this but pure philanthropy? Is there not some ulterior reason you have not given to me—perhaps not acknowledged to yourself?"

"None of weight, I think. If there is any other influence than a sense of duty and pity for the innocent sufferers in the affair, it takes its rise from the knowledge that I do not love the prime cause as well as a Christian man ought, and my natural feeling towards him would do him harm rather than good. Don't you remember, little mother, that long ago you taught me the only safeguard against temptation was to pursue the right with diligence?"

"Is that all, my son?"

A blush crept up to the edge of his hair, as he answered low and tenderly:

"All the harm that Dr. Conway suffers, *she* will feel too, and I would like she should be spared."

"'An honest confession is good for the soul;' but I ought not to have pressed you so sorely, my boy, my brave, unselfish boy."

A clinging caress told how his sorrows found answer in her heart. Bob drew the little head back and pressed warm kisses on eyes and lips.

"I must go, darling mother. Your prayers will follow me, and God will listen."

"Heaven bless you, yes! Bob, Mrs. Lipscomb sent word this afternoon for me to come and spend the night with her. Would you go?"

"Well, yes, I think I should. It will be less lonely for you there to-night." He paused in thought, then continued: "Dr. Conway wrote Miss Mary a letter this morning, and she answered it. Of course I can only surmise the relation between them which would justify the exchange of correspondence, when he is incapacitated for seeing her during a single day; of course you will be very careful not to pain her by any allusions."

"Trust me for that. I will put on my shawl and bonnet, and you may leave me there."

They stopped at the dining-room door, where Mrs. Brown was still busy about her domestic matters, and Bob explained where they were going, adding that he might not be back next day, as he had some thought of going out of town on a little business.

"I *would* like to know what he *is* up to. Something, *I'll* be bound," and Mrs. Brown shook her head at the depravity of that human nature which could presume to be up to anything that she did not know about.

Leaving his mother at Mrs. Lipscomb's door, Bob went to the livery-stable, and selected a horse suited to his needs—an active, spirited fellow, which could bear extra work; for he had determined to follow Buck McQuillan if he had gone on, provided he could find out the direction he had taken.

Several times it occurred to him that he might be troubling himself unnecessarily about a matter in which he had no personal concern; and which fairly promised, if simply let alone, to bring his lucky rival to disgrace. Why could n't he put down a stop-cock on conscience and let the Doctor's ill-wind blow *himself* a cargo of blessings? But he fought down the thought—it was not in Bob Dean to only begin a good thing —"to put his hand to the plough and look back." After examining his trapping, he mounted, and rode to Houston Ludwig's home. He had seen the lad in the afternoon, and unfolded his plans.

The boy's pony stood, saddled, in the shadow of a tree, a little distance from the gate; and Houston himself accosted Bob, as he approached, speaking in suppressed tone:

"I 'm all ready, Mr. Dean; but we must keep low, for maw don't know nothing about it. Sich a cuttin' up you never saw, as she 'd give us, if she was to find out."

"Come, Houston; that won't do. I can't have partnership in anything that is conducted on such a basis. Let us go in and ask her, and I think she will consent for you to go with me."

"Bound she won't. She 'll just go to cuttin' up. But you can do as you please; I ain't a-goin' in. Better not say nothin' about me bein' all ready; for then she 'll know I 'lowed to go 'thout askin'. And if she says no, then you jest ride on, and I 'll overtake you in 'bout a quarter."

"Oh, Houston! I am afraid you are a reprobate;" but Bob could not keep from laughing a little, as he went into Mrs. Ludwig's house. I say Mrs. Ludwig's house, because she was evidently the principal in the firm matrimonial.

She was sitting by a poor fire, sewing by the light of a poorer lamp, and fretting about the poverty and the troubles of life.

Her husband, sitting near, was holding a bald-headed baby, which he jogged on his knee, until its heavy head rolled from side to side, and the sugar-pap, which the father assayed to hold to its mouth, came in contact as often with the eyes, nose, and chin, as with the rightful member. Several other children were about the fire, disputing over a skilletful of parched corn, which one—a boy about ten years—had just lifted from the coals.

"Say, sis; gimme that rag; the caun 's burnin'; and the plaguey thing 's hot."

"Shan't do it."

"Well, I reckin I kin git it;" and he pushed the girl over on the floor, seizing the coveted article from her lap, while she struggled for her equilibrium.

"Maw! maw! Robert Lee he 's gone and took my new doll dress, to lift his old skillet! Maw! hoo-oo-oo!"

"Shet up yer racket! I 'll whup the las' one of you, fust thing you know! Come in, Mr. Dean. I am real glad to see you. It 's clever of you to come to visit us, unless we had a pleasanter place to receive you."

Her tone and language, while addressing her visitor contrasted strongly with that which she served to her own family.

"Marthy Washington! git up and give Mr. Dean that cheer. You can't never see nothing till you 're told to. Some how, things are always in a hub-bub here. I have so much to do, I can't attend to everything, and Mr. Ludwig don't try to help me any. I believe he 'd let the childern pull the house down right over his ears, and never speak a word to 'em. *I lay, I stop your noise directly!* Sam Houston! Bring me a switch! Where is Sam Houston? Robert E. Lee, where is your brother?"

"Do 'no 'm. Up to some o' his shines! He don't stay

home nights, and be good like me," answered the prototype of Virginia's illustrious hero, filling his mouth with corn, which he alternately ground and blew through his teeth to cool.

"I have not time to stop, madam. I only called a moment to ask a favor of you," said Bob, as soon as he could find a place to speak.

"La, me! I don't see how I could do you any favor. If it is money you want for Houston's schooling, I just have n't got it. I work hard, and try to pay my honest debts, but I have everything on my shoulders, and Ludwig don't try to help me a bit."

"Oh, now, Sary, you had n't ought to say that. You know I always do what I can, when I can git a job, but when a man's down in the world, it 's mighty hard to git a start agin."

"Down in the world! I should guess we would go to the bottom, if there was any, if I waited for you to make a start. Jobs don't go round peepin' into lazy men's doors, huntin' for somebody to do 'em; and Sam Houston has got so he 's always gone, and no tellin' what he is up to. I don't know where he is at this very minute—with some bad boys, I 'll be bound. I thought the school was to be free, this four months, or I would n't have sent him. It 's true, he 's more 'n fourteen; but Mr. Gooch he said, being as I was so hard up, he'd put him down under, as he never got no benefit while he was younger."

Bob was sorely tempted to stop her mouth with his hand long enough to state his business; however, he only raised his voice very loud and interrupted, feeling that the circumstances warranted the rudeness.

"Yes, madam, I understand. It is not money I came for,

but your permission to have Houston to-night and to-morrow. I have a ride in the country to make, and I do not know the roads, and want him for a guide and for company."

"La! me; I don't know what to say. He does know the roads everywhere, for he drove a wagon and delivered fruit trees for an agent all the fall. But I don't know where he is to-night."

"I think I can find him," said Bob, unconsciously acting on the principle for which he had just chided Houston. He could not so much blame the boy upon better acquaintance with the mother. He concluded that his best plan to secure her consent was to take it for granted and act upon it before she could get her volley of talk off again; so he thanked her heartily and withdrew, shutting the door behind him. Three steps out in the yard he felt Houston's hand on his arm.

"Took her by storm! That was right; I was listening. If you had waited three minutes, she 'd a said no. If I 'd a asked her, she 'd a hollered no all night," said he, laughing and mounting his pony. This was a little scrubby fellow, poor and ill kept, but holding a deal of endurance and strength within his shaggy mustang hide. How he had come into the boy's possession had remained a mystery to his mother. All efforts on her part to unveil the secret had proved vain, for Houston would only tell her "he did not steal it, and it should n't cost her anything—that was enough for her to know." It is true that what corn the beast ate his master managed in some manner to provide; he would even exert himself to labor a little rather than his "Dexter" should go too hungry.

The sky was overcast with thin clouds and the light of the moon dim, but their road was plain and good, and they made fair speed. The ride was without adventure, and at a little

past one in the morning they reached the place of which they were in quest. Man, boy, and beast were tired and sleepy when Bob hallooed at the fence of one Simon Miller, whom he was seeking. The summons had to be repeated several times before it brought a response, in the head of Mr. Miller himself thrust out of the half-open door.

"Hello! What's wanted?"

"Is that Mr. Simon Miller?'

"I'm the man."

"Please come out; I want a few words with you."

"You come in; I'm not dressed," said Mr. Miller, suspiciously.

Bob dismounted, and giving Houston his bridle to hold, walked quite up to the steps, saying:

"My name is Dean, Mr. Miller. I have come from C——, to-night, in search of Mr. McQuillan, whom I was told I would find here."

"I don't know anything about the man. If that's all you want, you've come to the wrong place." He paused a moment; but Bob was thinking and not ready to speak, so he continued, "But you had as well come in and stay till mornin'."

There was the sound within the house of a pistol being cocked, and a door softly opened and closed.

"You are trying to deceive me, Mr. Miller. He *is* here, and I know it. I do not want to harm him in any way, but to help him. I come with a message from his father, and would be glad you would tell him—he knows me."

"You've come to the wrong place, Mr. Dean, and that's all I've got to say;" but there was not the sound of honesty in his voice.

"I will wait here while you go in, sir," said Bob, doggedly. "You might know I could not have found him if his father had not have directed me—he will know it."

"I tell you, I don't know anything about the fellow. You can stand there, though, as long as you like. I am going to bed;" and he shut the door on Bob, who patiently kept his position on the steps, believing he would tell Buck his business, and that the latter would credit his message. There now came the sound of a bed creaking, as if some heavy person were getting into it, and Bob began to fear he would verify his threat, and leave him standing post that winter night; but presently the back door again opened softly, and bare feet slipped out—a low whistle, answered from the haw-thicket back of the house—a stillness in the night—then a cautious footstep approaching.

"Mr. Dean," in a whisper, "are you by yerself?"

"No one is with me here, Buck, but Houston Ludwig is at the gate."

"Come out here, in the back yard, then, an' I'll talk to you."

Buck laid his hand on Bob's shoulder, and, making a dexterous movement downward, ascertained that he carried no arms; then with more confidence led him off, not into the back yard, but into the thicket back of it. Bob appreciated the situation, but placed himself entirely at the mercy of the desperate man, that he might more perfectly secure his confidence.

Seated on a fallen tree, he rested his weary limbs, while he explained to Buck all the circumstances of the case—how they came to his knowledge, and what he proposed to do; appealing to him, in the close, on behalf of his aged, grieving parents.

"I tell you, Mr. Dean, it don't take no beggin' to make me go back, as fur as they's concerned. An' 'ef it's like you say—an' I ain't a doubtin' yo' word—I s'pose they ain't no

obsticul to my goin' back. But puttin' the promise in writin',"—Bob had suggested that Buck sign his name or put his "mark" to a written obligation,—"puttin' it in writin' ain't no use, fur sence I found out what a sneak he is, an' a liar in the bargain, I hain't no mo' use fur him, not even to shoot him, fur he ain't wuth a good round bullet. Ef he 'll stay away from me an' mine, I ain't gwine to bother him; but ef he goes to puttin' in agin, or even dares to speak to Aggie, ef she ain't mine any longer, I 'll shoot or stomp his liver outen him, even ef you was to have yo' arms full of writins' all a sayin' I would n't. So 'taint no use to write, fur I would n't regard it no more than fur it to be spoke."

"In that case I withdraw my security too, then, and will not promise to come between you and harm, should it come. You will both have to look after your own welfare."

"All right. I know, after takin' so much trouble fur me an' mine, you hain't a goin' to turn State's evidens, an' ef it does *leak* out, I 'll stand the consequences."

"I don't see how there can be any ill consequences. Dr. Conway will be as sound as ever in a week, and he can't have the face to come out and say you shot him, after telling everybody that it was an accident."

"No tellin' what he 'd have the face to say; but it don't look likely. Anyhow, I 'm a thousand times 'bleeged to you fur comin' way here in the night to let me know; I 'd a been peertly on my way to Georgetown by daylight. I was a makin, straight fur the mountains, an' no tellin' when I 'd a come back, I was so sure I 'd killed the sneak. Umph! Think o' him drappin' off 'n his horse purpose to fool me."

"Well, I must be starting, Buck. It is late, and our tired horses will not travel fast. Will you come with me, or wait until morning?"

"Both! You will stay here the rest of the night, and go to bed, you an' the boy, and I 'll feed yo' hosses."

"I don't think your host feels very kindly towards me," said Bob, doubtfully.

"Who? Uncle Simon? Pshaw! he 's all right. He thought you was a huntin' me, to 'rest me; you see he did n't know you, and he 's a good friend of mine; he 'd stand by me through thick an' thin. You bet, Uncle Simon's all right."

CHAPTER XXIV.

BEE SPRINGS AND SAN JACINTO DAY.

"HERE are some nice ones, Mrs. Dean."

"They are all nice. Where do you get such fine nuts?"

"Clarence Vaughn brought me these. Sometimes we have nutting parties and go to the river-bottoms for them."

"Go to the river-bottoms! What can you mean?"

"Just what I said," answered Mary, laughing; "I did not say to the bottom of the river, please understand—the transposition is everything in this instance. But, since you do not understand our provincial phraseology, I will explain that I had reference to the low-lying alluvial strips of soil which border Little River, San Gabriel, and other streams, on each side, producing a magnificent growth of vegetable monarchs!" and she bowed with mock dignity.

"Ah! I am glad to know you do not need to go under. I have a cattish horror of getting wet—especially my feet. But these pecans are worth a little inconvenience."

"Yes, we don't often get such fine ones as these of Clarence's."

"He is as good as his pecans, too!" said Mrs. Lipscomb, who was sitting in her arm-chair, watching Mrs. Dean and Mary eat their nuts.

"Who? Clarence? Yes, he is. He is a stanch friend of your son, Mrs. Dean," said Mary, getting down on her knees before the sparkling fire to crack a new supply of nuts, with the tack-hammer, in lieu of the nut-crackers which had mysteriously gotten out of place when wanted to-night. She was looking very sweetly, with just a shade of stirred feeling behind the calm exterior which told to the beholder that she possessed her soul in peace. Only the jealous eye of her mother could see that her cheerfulness was nearer to gayety than was natural. When she mentioned Bob, his mother wished he could see her, kneeling there, the picture of grace, with the fire-light bringing out the gold in her shining hair, and deepening the depths of her beautiful eyes. But, upon second thought, Mrs. Dean was glad he could not see her, for each new beauty could but add to the burden of disappointment he might have to bear.

There was a white chrysanthemum in her hair, the last of the season, which she had found alone on its stalk that afternoon. Mrs. Dean now remembered that both times she had seen Mary, she had worn one of the kind; then her thoughts found a reason for a brown and withered one she had discovered in Bob's vest-pocket, a few hours ago, when folding that article away after church-wear. It lay in company with a bit of torn sheet-music, and she had thought to rally him upon the hoarding; but she reconsidered now, and gave him a sigh of commiseration, thinking:

"I did n't believe Bob would ever be *soft* about anything;

but, as Gressett says, 'Love places a genius and a fool on a level.'"

Mary now arose from her humble attitude, and offered her nuts, while she smiled at Mrs. Dean's abstraction. That lady noticed it, and rallied the conversation.

"What were you saying? My thoughts ran away with me —oh, about Bob—yes; and he thinks a great deal of Clarence, too; and also Houston Ludwig. He has spoken to me about them both."

"Well," said Mrs. Lipscomb, "Houston is a strange kind of a boy; but I think he is like my peach preserves—better than he appears. *He* thinks a great deal of his teacher, too."

"Boys nearly always like Bob," said his mother.

"It is curious how little use they have for Dr. Conway. Houston can take him off to a T—the way he has of rubbing down his beard, and fixing his moustache," and Mrs. Lipscomb's voice came near betraying her own opinion of the man. She was sorry the instant she had spoken, for she did not want to wound her child anew.

"That is Laura's way of designating him," said Mary, with an effort.

It was hard for her to hear him spoken of to-night without losing her self-control. The heat of anger, which the first knowledge of his duplicity had called up, having subsided, reaction in his favor had set in; and just now she only remembered he loved her, had plead for her, and that she had lost him, and had no lover. Most women will understand, as will those men who have learned to know women's hearts—will understand, and not utterly condemn; remembering it was but the reaction of the heart, and not the dictation of judgment. She was very sorry for herself to-night; and it was well that Mrs. Dean remembered that Dr. Conway was a forbidden subject, and directed the conversation to another channel.

"Miss Jennie thinks the Christmas Tree was an entire success."

"I should like to have gone. Oh! I must show you my present, which some unknown friend was kind enough to put on the Tree for me," and Mary brought forward a handsomely-bound book of music. "See! some of the best and latest selections of both sacred and secular music. Here, on the fly-leaf, is gummed a wreath of exquisite ferns, making a fit place for a presentation address; but only my name, in German script, within. The gift-committee sent it up to me; but no one seems to know the donor. They say it was left on the table, the day they were arranging the Tree, by some unknown hand, with only my address on the paper wrapper."

"Some one who knows you love music and make it," said Mrs. Dean, smiling. Mrs. Lipscomb suspected she knew more about it than she chose to tell. Mary, looking up, intercepted the significant glance which passed between them, and exclaimed:

"Ah, I know now! You brought it for me. You are too kind," and she bestowed on her a kiss by way of thanks.

"I do not deserve your thanks, dear, though I gratefully accept the kiss in Bob's behalf, who made the gift. He wrote to me to have the book bound for you, even naming the pieces of music to compose it. I arranged the ferns, and he wrote the presentation."

"It is beautiful. How lovely those ferns are! Do you know, Mrs. Dean, I have never seen ferns grow excepting in a cultivated state."

"Indeed! They are much more beautiful when Nature plants them, for she knows just what tints of background to give them. The most expensive and elegant vase of the florist cannot compare for effect with the browns and grays and lichen

fringes of their native mouldy rocks. They flourish luxuriantly around Austin. These came from Bee Springs."

"And where are they?" asked Mary, eager for Mrs. Dean to talk.

"Bee Spring? It is a natural grotto and spring about four miles northwest from the city, beyond the Colorado River. I wish you could see it; it is beautiful."

"Please tell me about it—just like you saw it, I mean."

"If you will allow me to tell a little story with the description, I will. They are so blended in my mind, I should be puzzled to separate them," said Mrs. Dean, laughing.

"Oh, that will be delightful. Can't you begin with 'once upon a time'?"

"'Once upon a time,' and the last time I visited the place, was when I gathered these ferns. It was the twenty-first of April, San Jacinto's day, which is quite generally observed in Austin as a public holiday. The government offices are all closed, as also are the banks, schools, and most of the business-houses. There was a great stir in town about a fireman's picnic excursion to Round Rock. All the fire, hook and ladder, and military companies of Austin, and from some neighboring towns, were to unite and have a grand celebration at 'Fireman's Grove,' near Round Rock. A good many citizens, also, were going, and those of us who did not care for that kind of pleasure still felt as if we should be defrauded of our legitimate rights if we remained quietly at home. So a friend of mine, who had two grown sons clerking in mercantile houses, proposed that we make up a little party and spend the day at Bee Spring. Her boys were closely confined to their business, and needed the recreation which the holiday offered; and, being naturally more than gay, she objected to having them attend the larger affair at Round Rock, where

beer-drinking and dancing were to be conspicuous features of amusement. Bob wanted to go, while I was very indifferent about it, for the weather looked threatening. But my friend arranged everything, and one of the open wagons called for us about nine o'clock.

"Our road lay up the river for a mile or more, through the beautiful cedar-clad hills and lime-quarry cliffs. On our right, we had picturesque glimpses of suburban residences, with the castle-like battlements of the military institute, lending a Rhenish grandeur to the scene. Before us, the most southern spurs of Lampasas Mountains broke the view; their purple haze furnishing just the needful background tint for the picture. At short intervals, a turn in the winding road would reveal glimpses of the beautiful river, which, presently, we reached and forded. There the view was enchanting, up and down, as far as the eye could stretch.

"On the further side we met a difficulty in the nature of a sand-bed, which tried our horses' strength and our human patience—or impatience; which latter predominated among the elder persons of our number. The young folks were happy anywhere, for the party had been judiciously selected, and each one's sweetheart was along. They had made a foray on the lunch-baskets, abstracting a number of lemons and a box of sugar, and they made the air merry with their laughter and songs.

"We finally pulled through the sand, and, climbing a steep hill, immediately descended into a ravine; then up another rise, when we passed under an overhanging cliff, through which the water had percolated, till it produced a bog in the road beneath. Our teams were none of the strongest, and here the front one refused to pull, resisting every urgent measure with kicks and plunges. The ladies, of course,

screamed, and began leaping out into the mud; for, really, the situation looked dangerous—our road lying on the edge of a bluff, and only wide enough for one vehicle, while the cliff shut us in on the left, and there was a sheer fall of twenty feet or more on the right. But, though I have always entertained the fatalistic idea that our lives would be preserved until we have run our destined course, yet there are no policies assuring dry feet, and so I had to be responsible on that score myself; and, as I had been so imprudent as to come out in Newport ties, I kept my seat. I was the only person left in our wagon, except one timid girl, who was afraid to jump lest she fall. Presently, Bob came, and lifting me in his arms, carried me to a nice, flat rock, under the edge of the overhanging cliff. So my feet were all right. Then they unfastened the horses from the rear wagon, and, putting them before the stubborn team, pulled them out.

"When about to hitch up and proceed, some one suggested that we leave the vehicles there, and walk to the springs, as they were but a little farther. Bob and I remained behind awhile, and were rewarded by one of the grandest views I ever saw. Immediately in front was the narrow bed of Bee Spring Creek, twenty feet below us, where the blue waters tumbled and whirled around the great, brown rocks. On the opposite side was a green flat, some sixty yards wide, covered with flowers, in countless number and variety. Behind this rose a broken ledge of cliffs, I suppose more than a hundred feet high, where the different strata displayed each an individual color, varying from snowy white through the shades of gray, neutral, blue, brown, and almost green. The general effect was sombre in the extreme. In the niches and recesses of these cliffs, the bees once had their populous homes, culling their harvest of nectar from the bounteous garden at the foot.

Hence the name of the adjacent springs. I believe some hives are still found here; but the bees have learned from experience to be shy of human marauders, and generally choose inaccessible strongholds.

"Beyond these shelving rocks, the mountains rise in solemn grandeur, looming up, one behind another, in the distance until their purple is lost in the blue. Above us frowned another cliff, about fifteen feet high, jutting over the road like a vaulted roof, or resembling more a mammoth umbrella. From this hang the ferns, principally the species known as 'Maiden's Hair' (Adiantum Capillus Veneris), though there are some of the 'Mother Ferns' (Polypodium Vulgare). They look like fairy fringe-work, so light, so fantastic, and lovely, with their roots fixed in the friendly crevices of the rocks and nourished by the ever-dripping water, which trickles through them and falls tinkling on the flints below. This last feature, though weird and charming to the imagination, did not add to my present comfort, for our day's misfortunes had reached their climax in a steady, patient-falling rain, and all nature was now wet, both under and beyond the cliff. We could hear the shouting and talking of our friends, and concluded to join them, and ascertain if they had found any way to extract comfort from our unpropitious surroundings. We had secured a fine supply of ferns, and, having bound their roots in his handkerchief (for they are very sensitive to rough handling), Bob put them in a damp, secure place and helped me down from my rock.

"We found our party a short distance beyond a turn in the road; the young folks clambering among the rocks, and climbing the mountain side, regardless of soiled dresses and muddy shoes. Some had donned rubber cloaks, offered by their escorts, and they were a mad and merry crew. The

elder ladies, with pinned-up skirts and woe-begone faces, sought insufficient shelter under umbrellas and trees. Here was the spring, too, lovely enough, though nobody thought of it now. Bursting right through a cleft in the stone wall, it poured like a mill-race down about two feet, then crossed the road and tumbled over the precipice below in a seething torrent—little, but perfect in its style. But I am growing tedious, and, having described the scenery, will cut off the thread of my narrative."

"Oh! no, Mrs. Dean! I enjoy it, and must know the rest," cried Mary. "I am anxious to know how you managed a picnic in the rain. I feel sure that *you* did manage some way to make it pleasant."

"Oh, there was a house just across the creek, and Bob went over and begged leave to spread our dinner in the hall; this the lady of the house readily granted, saying we could have the hall and two rooms besides. We soon tumbled in—no other word would express the manner of our entrance—and found plenty of room, for the people had been married but a few months, and positively had *nothing* in the house except a bed, one little trunk, a large box, a few cooking-vessels, four plates, and two cups and saucers. There was not even a chair.

"The wife—a girl of fifteen—was sitting on the side of the bed, sewing, and her husband, not many years her senior, was seated on the trunk whetting his axe with a little stone. They had very little to eat either, I found, and not much to wear, though the wife put a bit of purple ribbon around her neck after we got in. She had no collar or ruffle to her dress.

"They were from the mountains, and he was a wood-cutter. We had a most bountiful and elegant lunch, and, as is usually

the case, enough for twice our number. When we had finished, the ladies offered what remained to the little wife, which she received with wide eyes of astonishment and eagerness. There was enough to have kept her table in princely abundance for a week.

"We loaded up immediately after dinner, and returned to town in time to see the excursion train from Round Rock come in, with its bedrabbled and worn-out freight. They had looked so gay and elegant in the morning, clad in fresh linens and lawns, and even spring silks and new bonnets. But the cars were open flats; and streaming pennons and gay banners were poor defence against the pelting rain. They were a pitiable spectacle. The papers had much sport at their expense, calling them 'Land Grabbers,' because of the quantity of black, waxy mud from the prairie, which clung to the once dainty feet. Some one even compared the ladies' shoes to 'Morgan's mud-scows.'"

"How ridiculous!" exclaimed Mary; then drawing a deep breath she continued, "It was so lovely to hear you tell it. Oh! I wish I could see it, and all the beautiful scenery about Austin, of which I have heard Mr. Dean speak so enthusiastically."

"I shall have a home there again, some time, and then you will come and pay me a long visit, and we will go everywhere that is worth looking at."

"That would be delightful."

Mary sat turning over the leaves of her music-book, thoughtfully. A little exclamation of surprise.

"Oh! here is 'Lucia di Lammermoor,' Mrs. Dean. I must tell you something laughable about that piece of music," and her gurgling laugh made melody such as has never been written.

"I expect I know what you mean. Bob told me how he ran into an acquaintance with you," said Mrs. Dean, joining in Mary's laugh.

"Country people, you know, sometimes call the receiving of an introduction to a stranger 'getting knocked down' to him. I could not help thinking of this, and that was what made me laugh so," said Mary.

"Let us have some music now," begged Mrs. Lipscomb, turning towards the piano.

"Yes, please, Mrs. Dean, sing for us; your son has told us how you love music."

"My voice is not so strong as it used to be, and is but indifferent without Bob's to sustain it. It always seems strange to me to sing without him. We have sung together almost every night of his life since he was three years old until he came here." The little mother's voice was husky, and her gray eyes were too bright to be dry.

"He sings for us nearly every time he comes. For a time, while mother was at the worst, she took a fancy that she could not go to sleep until he had sung to her. It was beautiful."

"Yes," said Mrs. Lipscomb, "I would shut my eyes, and the music would seem to get further off, until I could dream it was an angel in heaven I heard. But it was best when Mary sang with him."

Everything that Mary had a part in was best in her mother's estimation.

Something there was in that last remark which touched a hidden spring of sympathy in Bob's mother, for she suddenly left the piano where she had stood, turning the loose sheets of music, and coming behind Mrs. Lipscomb's chair, stooped down and kissed her, leaving a tear on her cheek. Mary thought she was moved by the praise of her boy, but Mrs.

Lipscomb found another source for the current of feeling which had prompted the act of demonstration.

"And now let *us* sing together," said Mrs. Dean, seating herself at the piano a moment later. "Perhaps our two voices in a new combination may not make bad music." Her utterance still trembled a little, for her mind had gone after Bob, now riding in the darkness over strange roads, perhaps into danger. But her skilled fingers brought unthought-of melody from the instrument, and when their united voices rose in unison the music was inexpressibly sweet. Passers on the sidewalk paused and listened with charmed attention, and vainly sought to catch a glimpse of the performers whom white curtains hid from view, only tantalizingly revealing a shadowed outline.

When the music was finished, the social little party retired for the night. Mrs. Lipscomb shared her bed with the guest. Like many persons who are past their youth, she was not a ready sleeper; besides, during her illness she had used opiates freely, and the disposition to wakefulness was doubtless aggravated thereby. Perhaps these were the reasons that the two mothers talked far into the night.

Mary, lying in the next room, tried to make this excuse for *her* mother, yet she very much feared she was telling some "tales out of school," for the murmur of their voices was low and earnest, except once or twice, when her mother's took on that sharp ring it was wont to have when she was indignant. She comforted herself, however, with the thought that the deposits of confidence, whatever they might be, were safe with Mrs. Dean; in fact, she argued with herself, she did not see, were she in her mother's place, how she could help opening her own heart to the sweet and gentle woman. Now she fell to thinking of the loving and loved mother and son,

and even imagined how fondly Bob would love his wife when Providence and his own will should give him one. She verily believed if he were to make up his mind to have a woman love him, she would find herself compelled, by the very force of that will, to do so. Unconsciously she half-envied that future woman—or present, she might be; for it was quite probable he had already made his choice. He was so simple and cordial with ladies—so different from young men who sought to make an impression, even as if his wooing were all done.

Truly Bob had succeeded well in his purpose of concealing his affection, for nothing could be further from her thought than that *she* were that envied woman. Had she guessed it, 't is probable she would have recoiled from the thought of even Bob Dean's love, much as she honored him; for she yet trembled when she remembered the narrow escape she had so lately made of binding her life to that of a wicked man. She felt love to be a tyrant, and, fearing, would fain elude his toils. But her heart warmed towards Bob, as she thought of the hours of weary watching he had shared with her, beguiling their tedium by his sensible and friendly talk, and always thoughtful for her comfort.

"I hope his sweetheart is good and worthy of him—but he could make any woman good," and she turned over and fell asleep, with a prayer in her heart for his happiness, and a thanksgiving that she had been saved from the peril of a life's shipwreck with a worse man. Yet there was a tear on her cheek—a tear of self-pity, of grief for her wasted love, which she just now felt could never be gathered again. Lives there a woman who has not, at some time and in some degree, felt the same?

Mary's surmise about the exchange of confidence in the

next room was wrong, only in that it did not reach half the ground covered by the confidence.

They began on indifferent topics. But the common enjoyment of the same pairs of blankets and sheets, is not conducive to reserve. Neither could have told afterwards how it came; but it was not long till each mother had told to the other the story of *her* child's trouble. When Mrs. Dean found that Mrs. Lipscomb knew the truth about Dr. Conway, and that he and Mary certainly were not engaged, she felt that the ban laid by Bob upon her was removed, and they could talk freely about the whole matter. She told Mrs. Lipscomb of Bob's night enterprise, and the plans they had made to bring about a reconciliation between Buck and his sweetheart. They talked of Mary's escape, too; and in talking of her, somehow, Bob's love came out. Mrs. Lipscomb was not surprised; in fact, she had sharply suspected it for some time. But she did not encourage his mother to hope that his suit would prove successful; on the contrary, she feared the shock Mary's confidence had just sustained would prevent her from forming any new ties soon. But that she entertained the highest respect and friendship for him was certain.

They agreed it would be far better to keep the knowledge from her at present, trusting to time to weld the bonds of friendship into closer links.

"It will be a world of comfort to poor, dear Bob, to know that she has not promised herself away. I suppose I may tell him that!"

"I should think you might. Let him take all the comfort he can. I wish it were more, for, dear Mrs. Dean, I would rather leave her for him to take care of, when I am called home, than anybody I know besides."

CHAPTER XXV.

I WOULD N'T TRUST HIM, BUT I WOULD LOVE HIM ALL THE SAME."

"The only art
To give repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom is—to die!"

IT was Wednesday afternoon before Bob found it convenient to verify his promise to take his mother to see the McQuillan family.

He took a buggy which would accommodate three persons, and Mary Lipscomb went along to see Agnes Vinson. In the council held after Bob's return from his expedition, and after he had learned from his mother that Mrs. Lipscomb and Mary were acquainted with the girl's sad story, they had agreed that Mary was the one best fitted to gain her confidence.

Bob had advised Buck to stay away from her, and to betray no interest in her, until his ground should be prepared for him.

He had readily assented to this, declaring:

"I ain't a gwine to throw myself in her way, no how,—not even to look at her, 'thout I know she wants me ter—though I don't blame her, mind."

Bob left his mother at the McQuillan's gate, and then drove with Mary to the Vinson double log-house. After helping her out, he left her, promising to return for her in less than an hour.

The widow, Polly, who was engaged in hanging out some

badly-washed clothes in the yard, directed Mary to go in, saying:

"Agnes is in the house there. I don't know whether she is any better or not—'deed I don't know if there 's anything the matter with her, except the sulks; you can go in and see her. You'll have to excuse me for awhile. I 've got to git my clothes hung out before I can quit—some folk, though, can git along without work."

Mary found Agnes sitting on the dirty hearth, her chin resting in the palm of her hand, and her stolid eyes fixed gloomily on the fire.

"Good-evening, Agnes. Laura told me you have been sick, and I have come to see you," said Mary, taking a chair by her side, and laying her hand on the girl's passive fingers.

"I am much 'bliged to you, ma'am;" but she turned her gaze back to the fire, and Mary took notice of the paleness of her sallow cheeks, and the dark circles under her eyes.

"You are better, are you not?"

"Yes 'm, I s'pose so."

Her voice is husky, and she clears her throat.

"Agnes, I have heard your sad story, and have come to see if I can help you in any way."

"I don't s'pose there 's any help for such as me. I don't deserve none;" and she replaces her hand under her chin, and looks still at the fire.

"I do not feel that way about you, Agnes. I think you are more wronged than in the wrong."

Mary feels very indignant with Dr. Conway, and does not see how she could ever have loved him.

"No, ma'am; I had n't ought to have been such a fool as to believe a man like *him* could be anything to the likes of

me; but I did believe him, and there 's no help for me now. But I reckin I can die, and get outen everybody's way."

Her voice is thick and tremulous, but the heavy face is immovably still.

"Oh, Agnes! you must not feel so; and you certainly ought not to talk so, or some one will think you are worse than you are."

"It don't matter what folks think. When you break a woman's heart, there ain't no pride left in her."

"But your heart is not broken; it is your wounded pride which makes you feel so mortified and despondent. And *he* is not worthy the sacrifice of your life; he is not half as good as you are, for he is neither honest with himself nor with any one else."

Mary's indignation against Dr. Conway increases every moment, for she just now fully realizes the measure of his sin, as she sits by the side of this poor stranded life—a victim to the blandishments of *her own* handsome lover.

"Oh! you don't know, Miss Mary. Wounded pride would n't make me dream of him, night after night—dream I could hear his voice, and look into his eyes; dreamed he touched me, and I was full of happiness. Oh! you don't know;" and she broke down into tears, having confessed all her weakness.

Mary pressed her hand, and wept in company. She began to feel that she "did not know," and to fear her task was a hopeless one; but she made another effort.

"But you will not love him, when you remember he denies having sought your love; when you remember how false he is. It is not him you love, but what you thought him."

Mary was thinking of her own spoiled ideal.

"I never thought nothin' about it. I just loved him."

"If he were to come to you again, would you trust him?"

"No, ma'am. I would n't trust him; but I would love him all the same."

Her voice was low and tender, as if she were thinking of the sweetness of the possibility.

Mary knew her task was hopeless now. She could not understand this woman, with so much heart and so little pride.

"Knowing him as you do, do you *want* him to come back to you, Agnes?"

There was a doubt of her in Mary's voice, but it made no impression on her. She answered:

"No, ma'am. It would n't be any use; it would only be to fool me again. Miss Mary, I don't want anything but to be let alone"—"to die," her tone added.

The weariness and despair in her manner were piteous indeed.

Looking at her dejected figure, Mary saw it was useless to discuss the subject in that light any longer; so she changed her tactics.

"Have you heard that Buck has come back?"

"Yes 'm. But I have n't seen him."

"No; he is afraid you don't want to see him. He looks very sad and full of trouble."

"Yes 'm; he has lots to bear; and he ain't to blame either—he was always good to me, and I 've treated him worse than anybody." Tears came to her eyes, and Mary began to hope for Buck's cause.

"You do not blame him, then, for attacking Dr. Conway?"

"While I thought he was dead, I said I would never forgive Buck; but I remembered he done it for the love he had of me, and I was sorry for him to be a runnin' from home and everybody—and he always so kind-hearted."

"Would you like to see him, Agnes, and tell him you don't hold it against him?"

"No, ma'am. It would only freshen up our troubles. You all tell him, and then let him forget me—I ain't worth thinkin' about."

"But, Agnes, you must arouse yourself, and throw off this despair. God gave you your life with a purpose, and you ought to seek that purpose out, and do it. Even if you have no hope in yourself, live for others."

"'T would n't be any use—I have nobody since Grandma's gone. Laura has got you all to take care of her, and Aunt Polly don't care for me."

Mary talked some time longer with her, but could make no impression on her stolid indifference. She was half angry with the girl, while she pitied her from her soul. But she was glad to hear Bob drive the buggy up, for she had begun to "weary of well doing."

Agnes showed a little feeling in thanking her for her interest, but did not ask her to repeat the visit.

"Buck must stay away from her, until she begins to be anxious to see him. A little wholesome neglect from him will do her good, now," said Bob, when Mary had made her report.

"But, Mr. Dean, she looks so hopelessly sad—like her heart were indeed broken and she might die."

"'Men have died, and worms have eaten them, but not for love,'" quoted Bob, a little heartlessly Mary thought.

"Man is different from a woman, though, in things pertaining to the heart," ventured Mary, timidly, as if afraid to put her judgment against his.

A moment's pause, weighing her words, and he answered with a deep, earnest voice:

"No, Miss Mary, not essentially different, except as individuals. You and I, for instance, differ less than do you and Agnes—if you will pardon the personality."

In the dark eyes, searching her own, there was something she did not understand that stirred her heart. Had she looked well, she might have read his secret, but it was only a furtive glance she gave, ere her eyes fell under the thought that he was coupling Dr. Conway with herself, in his mind, while he contrasted her with Agnes. She did not know that he was aware of their present standing with each other, but she did know that he had suspected a nearer one. And oh, pitiable condition! she was ashamed that she had loved the Doctor, and heartily wished she could in some way let Bob know they were nothing to each other; but modesty, and justice to a rejected suitor, forbade an explanation, and she could only wait until time should make plain some things which words might not tell.

Unwittingly she had gotten into the habit of measuring things by Bob's standard of right and wrong, and so great was her respect for him that she was solicitous to do nothing which might compromise his good opinion.

Blind! blind! Bob Dean, sitting by her side, watching the rare color flit over her sweet face, would have given his new fortune ten times doubled, and all his world beside, to know he might have the right to be by her side the rest of his natural life. But now he observed how serious her looks were, and continued the conversation.

"You must not think I am unfeeling towards that poor girl yonder. I pity her as deeply as you do, but recommend a painful cure for a callous wound. She is stunned by the pressure of her woe—does not feel at all really, and we must put her benumbed nature to aching for sympathy before we offer a sedative."

"I understand you;" a long breath, and she continued almost in a whisper, "I wish Dr. Conway could see her as I did."

Bob's eyes are looking straight ahead, and his mouth is stern and hard in an instant, but he flips a fly with his whip, and is silent.

Mary watches the bare "Black-Jack" bushes as they fly past, and her thoughts are busy with the scene she has just left. She is thinking of what he said about a difference between her and Agnes, and her heart thrills with gratitude that God had made a difference.

Somehow, it seems to her that Bob Dean, as well as God, is taking care of her, and has been all along. It came into her mind to say something of this in a way of thanks, but on looking again into his troubled face she gave up the thought, and fell to wondering what that hidden sorrow was, which so often cast a gloom over him.

They now reached Mr. McQuillan's gate, and Mrs. Dean, having seen their approach, had made her adieus, and was coming to the gate accompanied by Buck.

Mary was grieved to see the eager, questioning look of his hungry eyes as they met hers.

Bob answered for her:

"No, Buck, you must not go yet—she does not want to see you, and if you put yourself in her way, she may learn to dread and dislike you—which she does not now. Tell him what she said, Miss Mary."

Buck's eyes are turned on her, as she says, as quietly as possible:

"She said that you had always been kind to her, and she had treated you worse than anybody. She remembers that what you have done wrong, was on account of the love you

had for her, and she does not hold it against you; but you must not go to see her, for it would only give you fresh pain; you must forget her."

Buck swallowed a big lump of disappointment, and muttered:

"I won't do that, if I live 'tell Jedgment Day; but mind, I don't blame *her*. I am much 'bleeged to you all, for the intrust you 've tuk; but it ain't no use," and he went off into the bushes on the bank of the creek, close by, to have out his "dark hour."

Bob and Mrs. Dean and Mary spoke but little on their homeward ride, for they carried full hearts.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CUPID'S DARTS, PIERCED HEARTS, AND SO FORTH.

"COMPLIMENTS of Mrs. G. Bernice Delgado to Dr. Conway, with many good wishes for his speedy recovery."

An elegant, frosted cake, decorated with devices of "pierced hearts and Cupid's darts," accompanied with a bouquet of delicate purple and white hyacinths, and the above compliments.

Jennie Brown took the basket from the bearer at the front door, and conveyed it into the dining-room, the more conveniently to inspect its contents, and assure herself that it contained nothing contraband.

Certainly, cake and flowers, and devices and compliments, could not be, in themselves, harmful to the interesting invalid

up-stairs; but since that troublesome letter, which yet remained all a mystery to her, had run the blockade, she had been vigilant and keen. Had this sweet demonstration been from some other source, she might have reluctantly forwarded it to its destination. But she chuckled with glee as she pictured the Doctor receiving this "remembrancer" from his fair enchantress (?), and instantly determined to carry it to him herself.

"What is that, Jennie?" said Mrs. Brown, coming in just as she had readjusted the silk paper around it. For answer, she opened it to inspection.

"What does the card say? I am making pies, and my hands are all over flour."

Jennie read it aloud, without comment.

"Humph," said Mrs. Brown. "Much he'll care for it. Suppose she thinks we can't make cake here, or perhaps she knows how fond he is of it, and is afraid he don't get enough. Be bound, it's sad inside; but she has prinked it up to make up for it—reminds me of her deceitful old face."

"Oh, mamma! what an idea! I am going to take it up to him myself. What do you think about it?"

"Jennie! if you ain't the beatenest case that ever was born. Message after message he has sent you, and you have taken no notice of him; and now, just because that is from her—that you know he hates worse than poison—you—well, you always did have a head on your shoulders."

Mrs. Brown shook her own head, but she was laughing.

"And malice in my heart?" said Jennie, going off with her burden of sweetness.

"Come in!" said Dr. Conway, in response to her rap at his door.

"It is I, Doctor—Jennie. Please open the door."

A man would have sneered, and a woman laughed, to see him go to the mirror, and touch up his beard, ere he responded to her request.

"Miss Jennie! How kind of you to come! And, do you think you have need to bring a peace-offering? You *have* treated me shabbily, but you need not have made your olive-branch so heavy."

Taking the basket from her, he put it on the table; and, with a suavity quite gratifying, proceeded to examine the presentation, which, he thought, maidenly modesty had prompted her to write, instead of delivering by "word of mouth."

All the *catty* qualities at Jennie's command were called into play, to keep back a grin, at the change in the Doctor's face, as the source of the gift dawned on his perception. She looked very demure, and kept her saucy eyes down on her ruffled white apron, as she answered:

"Oh, it is not my gift. Mrs. Delgado is more generous than I, or has more leisure. I have been too busy to come up before."

The fun was very close to the surface again, and she had to think of the most disgusting thing she knew of—which was assafœtida—to get back her gravity as she turned to leave the room.

"You are going to stay a *little* while with me, are you not?"

It was hard to tell whether Jennie's eyebrows or red mouth looked most like interrogation points, so pursed were they with assumed dignity.

"Thank you, Doctor. I must help my mamma this morning; she is making pies."

He wondered if Mrs. Brown had any fruit to put into those pies half as tempting as that round, red mouth.

"Well, I know you won't refuse to bring a knife and cut this thing for me. I should never find my way into it unassisted."

"Oh, yes, I will cut it for you." She tripped down-stairs for the knife.

"What did he say, Jennie?" asked her mother, who was waiting at the foot of the stairs for the news from the upper regions, while she dried her hands on her apron.

"Sh! His door is open; you will have to go and see."

She thought of his lugubrious countenance and quivered with inward mirth; but she got the knife and stopped in the parlor for a vase to put his flowers in.

Mrs. Brown's pies were not in condition just now to be left, so Jennie returned alone to the Doctor's room, where he was standing over the basket with a curious expression on his face.

"Where shall I cut? It is so full of hearts, there is no place. 'T would be a pity to break them, would n't it?" Just one little saucy glance upward, and her eyes are busy again over the problem before her.

Dr. Conway was silent, but a shade of stern resolve was settling on his features.

"Guess I'd better put the hearts in a safe place, out of danger," continued Jennie. Taking them off the cake, and wrapping in a piece of the silk paper, she laid them up on the mantel.

Oh, that human hearts could be wrapped in impervious coverings and laid out of harm's way, when women are so tantalizingly charming as Jennie Brown was this morning!

There being no further difficulty in the way, she helped him to a mammoth slice of the cake, which, contrary to her mother's prediction, was very good.

"Mrs. Delgado will not thank me for helping you eat it," she said, cutting herself a piece.

"Is not candy good with cake? Take a heart," said he, offering the paper.

"What! give me Mrs. Delgado's *sweethearts!*"

"Yes, I give you what, perhaps, Mrs. Delgado calls her *sweetheart*," he answered, significantly, trying to get her to look at him; but she would not.

"I will gladly give you all the plural ones and humbly offer you all of the *singular* one," he continued, and his magnetic eyes succeeded in drawing hers up one instant, only to drop back to the piece of cake she was eating.

"Oh, Dr. Conway, what a poor pun!" she answered, archly.

"The pun may be poor, but the subject is not. The offering is rich."

"What offering? the candy?"

"No; not the *candy* hearts; the humble, human heart, which is full of its wealth of love for you."

Bending down, he got another look into the soft black eyes, which she tried hard to make appear saucy and flippant, as was their wont.

Not a word she spoke, for she felt the hour had come of which she had so fondly dreamed, and which, of late, she feared would never come to her. But the coquetry was so strong within her, that she was sorely tempted to throw him off in spite, because he had been so tardy, and had only spoken now in following her leader; only she feared he would not speak it again, and she loved him too entirely to risk giving him up. So she kept silent, while she secretly despised her own tame spirit, which would suffer him to make love to her in so commonplace a manner.

"Will you take it, Jennie?"

His melodious voice made sweet music to her thumping heart; at least his voice was not commonplace. But when he prisoned the little brown hand in his, cake and all, she mischievously asked:

"Is it broken, or cut, or in any way mutilated?"

Dr. Conway could not tell how much purpose there might be in the question, and the doubt brought a blush to his cheeks; but he answered with an even voice:

"No; it is all yours now. Say; will you take it, little one?"

His perfumed beard touched her burning left cheek, and her heart beat so it nearly choked her.

"Jennie!"

"Here I am, mamma! What is it? Come on up!"

She flew from his side to the railing of the stairs, up which her mother was coming, with both hands full of a tray of glasses and a wine decanter.

Away from him, where he could not hear her wild heart-throbs, nor feel her thrill under his touch, she looked back at him one instant, with as much of her love in her eyes as she cared to have him see.

When she left him, with his question unanswered, he bit his lip in anger; but when he read the purport of her backward glance, he was satisfied, and received Mrs. Brown and her libation with his accustomed grace. If it were possible, Dr. Conway looked handsomer than usual this morning. A slight paleness and languor sat well on his massive manhood. His fine eyes were full of expression, and his easy self-possession excelled itself. The Doctor had made up his mind at last, and was much relieved that he could find himself so satisfied with his own decision—particularly, since that de-

cision was one fraught with prospect of so much personal comfort, in the possession of Jennie and her fortune.

"I think cake is a poor thing without wine," said Mrs. Brown, putting down her decanter.

"Mrs. Delgado's cake is not poor. Miss Jennie will bear testimony to that," said he, stoutly. "Now we will all have to eat another piece, to see if your excellent wine can add anything to its merits."

"I don't care to bolster up her work," responded Mrs. Brown, tartly.

"You should not be uncharitable, my dear madam."

Mrs. Brown could not understand why he should be so elated over his present, and wondered in her mind if he really *was* so fond of cake as to act like a boy, because he had a whole, big one at once. It could not be he was delighted because Mrs. Delgado had sent it, for he certainly always seemed bored at mention of her name. She resolved he should not be without cake any more, while he stayed in *her* house; for if there was any one thing which gave her unalloyed pleasure, it was to furnish people with what they loved to eat, and to see them eat it. She turned to leave the Doctor and Jennie as soon as she had finished her slice, saying:

"Leave the wine here, Jennie, while the cake lasts."

"I see you insinuate that it does improve the cake. I believe I agree with you, too. But I beg you will let it all go down-stairs, and serve it out to me in Q. S., as the druggists say, lest I enact the part of Greedy Harry, in juvenile lore—all but the hearts—I'll keep them," he added in a lower tone to Jennie, who was now left alone with him again.

"I thought they were mine," she answered, as she looked at the red wine in her glass, willing to bring back the subject her mother's coming had interrupted.

"So they are; but you and yours are mine, now and forever."

What he did to her, which made her velvet cheeks as red as the wine, we leave you to guess. Jennie was taken by storm, or perhaps she would not have submitted—perhaps, I say, for she loved him very much.

Now he drew a chair up for her, and another very near for himself, and said:

"Sit here a little while, my child; I want to talk to you about some things."

In that talk he made a tolerable free confession, and a fair case for himself. He did tell her most of the truth about Agnes Vinson and Buck, because he believed she already suspected it; and, in not trying to shield himself, took the advantage of throwing himself on her mercy. Indeed, by his account, he had done rather a chivalrous thing in concealing the true cause of his wound, since, the real facts divulged, would have dragged before the public the name of a misguided and silly, but honest young girl, with whom it had been his misfortune to have unconsciously gotten into an entanglement.

About Mary Lipscomb he was more reticent. This was the substance of his statement: He had been charmed with his winning little Jennie since the first time his eyes had drank in the lustre of hers. But when he became acquainted with Mary, he was, for a time, fascinated by her pure beauty—dazzling, but cold, compared to his ruby love—and he wavered in his regard for his precious little gem, his very own now. Not until confined to his solitary sick-room, from which he could hear the patter of her fairy feet tripping about the house, and her bird-like voice making music for all save himself—poor prisoner to his own unwariness—not till then did he

realize how entirely his future happiness lay in her hands; how wholly he loved her, and only her—loved her so utterly that all of earth's fortune he craved now was to have her his forever. Here he perpetrated that same deed again, which again deepened the already deep color of her olive cheeks; but he said not a word about the thirty thousand dollars which were to come with her.

This fulsome flattery, delivered in an ordinary manner, by an ordinary man, would have disgusted piquant, keen-sighted, æsthetic Jennie; but with the full power of rich voice, toned to the deepest feeling, dark eyes burning down into hers, thrilling hand clasping hers, and that magnificent beard sweeping her shoulder, how could she help drinking it in and being filled with bliss? What cared she for his faults? He loved her, and he was grand.

And did she believe him? Partly, yes. She still held opinion that there had been more between him and Mary than he had caused to appear, and she was not altogether satisfied about that letter yet; but she was convinced that he loved *herself* best *now*, and that was all she cared for. *She* did not propose to lay bare all *her* past flirtations and affairs of the heart to him, and she should not complain if he kept some passages of the "gone-by" in the dark.

On the whole she was tolerably well satisfied, and very full of bliss, as she came down stairs with the tray of glasses and decanter, followed by the Doctor, carrying his mutilated cake, minus the hearts.

He declared he would be immured in that den no longer. The fact was, that he had already stayed there three days more than there was a shadow of necessity for; his purpose in so doing being partly to bring Jennie to him, and partly a natural shyness to meet the inmates of the house assembled

in a body. But now that he had made up his mind as to the future, and had carried his point, he was no longer a waif, tossed about on the sea of uncertainty and buffeted by every man's opinion, but his very, old, assuming, handsome self—the irresistible Dr. Duval Conway, and he came forth to be made much of—a delectable creature to pet.

Jennie showed him into the sitting-room, where her mother, Mrs. Dean, and Bob were, and herself slipped off into the darkened parlor, to enjoy her cry on the cushion of her favorite rocking-chair. She could not tell what she wanted to cry for; but whenever anything unusual happened to her individually, she never felt just right until she got her "good cry."

For one instant, it flashed over her mind how false he was at heart, and could be to her, but she put the thought away, murmuring the words of her favorite song:

> "I know not, I ask not, if guilt 's in that heart,
> I know but that I love thee, whatever thou art."

And then she took her cry.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE LIGHT.

MRS. Brown's sitting-room is as cheery as it can be to-night, Friday night, the last of the waning year.

Mr. Brown and Dr. Conway are smoking and talking of local matters. They seem to be on excellent terms, and we take it for granted that the momentous question has been pro-

pounded, and has met a favorable answer. Remember, the Doctor has always been a favorite with Jennie's father, and now that the latter has learned the Doctor's accident was not caused by carelessness (which a man who worked with machinery is bound to condemn as a heinous crime), but was only the result of a little spirited "fun," he has fully restored the victim to favor, and he smokes and talks business with him quite as if he were already a member of the family.

Mrs. Dean is teaching Jennie a new stitch in crochet, and their talk is technical.

Bob is entertaining Mrs. Brown, who, as usual, is knitting.

"Do you like having so many people in your house, Mrs. Brown?" he asked.

"Having so many people in my house? What do you mean?" she exclaimed, for Bob never asked questions at random, and she was puzzling her mind to find the purport of this one.

"I mean just what I said," he answered. "For if you do like to have them, and will be complaisant to my arrangement, I purpose to keep mother here for two months longer."

Jennie stopped her work to listen, while Mrs. Dean smilingly awaited the conclusion.

"Oh, you mean that! Well, if she is the 'people,' I do like it. We will all be delighted to have her stay."

"Thank you, most heartily. I don't think she is as strong as she used to be," his gray eyes rested fondly on her gentle face a moment; "and I don't want her to work this winter and spring."

"I think *you* will have to work to keep her idle;" and kind Mrs. Brown nodded her head wisely.

"Oh, I intend keeping her busy pleasing me. If necessary, I'll 'be a boy again,' and have her take care of me."

"And she will pull your little shoes off, and rub your little feet warm, as she used to do," suggested Jennie.

Mrs. Dean wondered, while all eyes were turned on Bob's big boots, and the laugh was hilarious.

Mr. Brown and Dr. Conway were curious to know the joke, but no one volunteered an explanation.

In an instant Jennie wished she had done so, for her father looked about for a measure of retaliation.

"What are you doing with all that yarn, Jinse? Goin' to knit socks?"

"No, sir. I am going to crochet me a shawl like this one of Mrs. Dean's."

"Better be a piecin' you up quilts. In time o' my raisin', when a gal wanted to marry, she always had a good lot o' quilts ready."

Mrs. Dean and Bob looked wide-eyed curiosity, Mrs. Brown and the Doctor stolid unconsciousness, while Jennie only looked very red. Mr. Brown laughed dryly, saying:

"Humph! I come mighty nigh a-lettin' the cat out o' the wallet. But I reckin I can have my laugh, too."

Bob came to Jennie's relief by proposing that she go with him into the parlor and have some music.

Dr. Conway's smooth, white brow was corrugated into a very perceptible frown at the proposition, but neither Bob nor Jennie paid any heed to him. The latter, though she promised herself to him, had by no means, either expressly or tacitly, included her *will* in the bargain. In fact, just now, as she noted that majestic scowl, she said to herself:

"If he thinks to have me afraid of him, or his humors, he has several things to learn yet."

Never in her life had she looked prettier than when, with the rose still dyeing her cheeks, and the spirit, uncurbed,

dancing in her black eyes, she made her lover a low courtesy as she passed out of the door Bob Dean was holding open for her.

"So it is all arranged?" said Bob, as he opened the piano for Jennie, standing by, her face a perfect study, with its conflicting emotions.

"What all arranged? I don't understand you."

"Had n't you better tell me all about it, Miss Jennie? You have not forgotten our 'paction,' have you?"

"No, I have n't forgotten. I don't care if I do tell you. Yes, it is all arranged." Blushing anew, she stopped and looked up at him, when she saw the merriment was all gone from his friendly face, and only commiseration written thereon. "Are n't you going to congratulate me? You are a *nice* confidante!"

With an effort he banished the gravity, saying gently:

"I hope you will be very happy, little friend; but I think *he* is the party to be congratulated."

"And not I? For shame! So ungallant! Take care; I shall be his champion if you assail him."

"I would not assail him, Miss Jennie. Nevertheless, I cannot help saying I wish he were more worthy of you."

"Oh, Mr. Dean, I know as well as you how wicked he has been lately. I suppose you know it too, and mean that, for you always know everything; he told me all about it."

Bob looked surprised, but she went on:

"But he regrets it as much as any one could. I know he is not good; neither am I; but we love each other, and will try to help each other to be more true in the future than we have been in the past."

"And may God help you both, my friend," said Bob, fervently.

"Amen!" whispered Jennie, her tears falling fast.

Bob pressed her hand and continued:

"Look to Him for your help, Miss Jennie, and not to your love; for though 't is said 'Love renders women discreet,' yet it may sadly mislead you sometimes."

"I will—I do—I know love for him will not keep me right; it comes nearer making me do wrong." She lowered her voice almost to a whisper, and in broken utterance finished her sentence: "While I thought—he loved—Mary Lipscomb—best—I felt so desperate—I could have done—any wicked thing—to win him back."

Bob was silent a moment, and grave again, remembering the duplicity of the false man to whom she had given her warm, young heart. He breathed heavily as he spoke:

"I am glad it was not necessary, and that you were spared the pain of remembering it; but—" he weighed his words carefully—"the sin of your purpose is as dark as if it had been executed. I hope you are in earnest, Miss Jennie, when you say you trust in God for your help. The time will come, my friend, when you will be in sore need of His strength and comfort, and if you trust Him now, He will not fail you then."

"I know—I have known and felt it for a long time—that I needed other strength than my own—but I have put the thought away and would not look at it, and just went on having a good time. But when I found *he* did love me best, I was so thankful and glad, I promised my life to God if He would only show me how to please Him, and would teach me how to lead the Doctor—to Him, too."

The last under her breath, and the light in her young face was a gleam from heaven.

"God bless you, little sister!"

Bob's voice was as hearty as was the hand-clasp of fellowship he gave her, seeing she had passed "into the Light."

"You will not forget how much help I need?" she asked timidly.

"I will not forget to ask *for* you," he said, answering her unspoken wish.

A sudden interruption on the opening of the door—

"We did n't hear any music, and came to see what you two had done with it," said Mrs. Brown, ushering in Mrs. Dean and the Doctor. The latter had so manifestly disapproved of the continued silence in the parlor, that Mrs. Brown, to avoid unpleasant consequences, had suggested this movement, which her husband favored, saying those who wanted to sit up might go into the parlor, for he wanted to go to bed.

Mrs. Brown did not understand Dr. Conway as well as her daughter did. Jennie knew that to keep his jealousy on the *qui vive*, was the surest device to bring into a steady glow the fickle flame of his passion—that he tired early of those things it gave him no trouble to have. Besides, it was not in her to yield to tyranny, and she intended to compel his respect by her independence.

If the truth were confessed, the Doctor was a trifling bit afraid of his high-spirited little sweetheart; and she was wise enough to know it, and to hold her advantage.

Bob now lit the lamp, for he and Jennie had been talking with only the flame of the oak-wood fire for light.

"We were having a nice time, if we were not making music," said he, laughing.

But now they did devote themselves to the "discoursing of sweet sounds," and the evening sped merrily.

When the early hours had passed, and each of the cordial group had retired, we find Bob Dean seated, as we saw him

once before, alone by his fireside, with arms folded across his broad chest, and sober thought written on his Saxon brow. He felt that the pieces had been changed on the chess-board of his life, and he wanted to take a look at the situation and his bearings.

While he regretted Jennie's bonds to one whom he regarded as utterly lacking in the elements of true manhood, and while he petitioned Heaven to protect her young life from the blight of selfishness, yet he could not but realize that he was immensely relieved to have Dr. Conway, at last, bound by fetters which public opinion, his only mentor, would not suffer him to sever.

Bound to some one, any one, but Mary Lipscomb. His heart beat high when he remembered there was no longer any obstacle to his wooing her, with all the power of his surging love. Did he hope to win her? Certainly he did. So does every man who loves. While the heart throbs with adoration for one dear being, there is the hope—it may be a secret hope—that its idol will be won. When hope is utterly dead, love is buried—sometimes without dying, but shut in its grave all the same.

But Bob meant to be very wise. He would not be precipitate, for now he could afford to wait for her wounded spirit to recover its health, and its natural hunger for love—a thing every pure woman's heart will do, in time. A rare light rested on his honest face, as he dreamed of that coming time, and how he would step in to fill the craving, if God willed.

So rapt was he with the sweet vision, that he did not hear his mother come in, nor recognize her presence, until her lips were pressed upon the curls on his forehead.

"Precious mother!"

Enfolded in his arms, he draws her down on his lap.

"Bob! I know what is in your mind! It is in your face, too. I am so glad I can stay here with you now."

"Mrs. Brown is very kind; she has always been so to me."

"I am afraid she is not satisfied about Jennie's engagement. It is neither love, nor admiration, that is in her eyes when she looks at Dr. Conway."

"She knows him. But Jennie has always had her own way, and it would be useless to oppose her in this. She loves the man with all her heart."

"Poor child! What is before her, none can tell."

"God will take care of her; she says she has given Him her heart."

"That is good, anyway. And now, Bob, what shall we do in the two months to come?"

"Until Spring lectures? Take care of and enjoy each other, and—" he stopped without finishing his sentence.

"And Mary?" she added for him.

He smiled, and laying his head back, shut his eyes, while he drew her nearer—perhaps he was dreaming it was another woman's form he held against his heart.

"Don't set your heart too much on her, darling son. It may be you are not to have her after all."

"I can't help it, mother; it is too late to try now. If a blow like that should come, I hope my manhood is strong enough to meet it; but I shall not spoil the next two months in getting ready for it."

"And after the two months?"

"I have not thought much about the after," he said, smiling, "except that I shall go to lectures, and you will go with me. God willing, we will never be separated again, until one of us goes home."

"Have you told any one of the change in your fortune?"

"No; I would prefer no one here should know of it."

"You are not afraid it would have any influence on Mary's feelings?" Mrs. Dean's tone was almost indignant.

"I have never thought of such a thing. But it might on some others—Mrs. Delgado, for instance."

"Oh, Bob!"

"No, let us say nothing about the money, mother, but go quietly on at work; I at my school, and you in doing whatever God puts into your hands; but principally in trying to build up your strength."

He stroked her little thin hand gently, until she spoke again.

"I am learning to be glad of the money, son; you have never, in your life, known what it was to have more than just enough."

"We will try and do with it as father would have done, if he had not been wronged."

After a long, sweet silence she went for her Bible, and, laying it on his knee, took a seat near. He opened and read:

"'He that dwelleth in the secret places of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty;'" and on to the end of the ninety-first Psalm.

Hand in hand they bowed, while his full, sweet voice went up in thanksgiving and prayer.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TWO PICTURES.

"I WISH Mrs. Lipscomb and Mary would come and spend the day with us to-day," said Mrs. Brown, at the breakfast-table next morning. "I've a great mind to send

the buggy round for them. I don't believe it would hurt Mrs. Lipscomb one bit to eat New Year's dinner with us to-day."

"That is a good idea," assented Bob. "Please send me with the buggy."

"And I will go along to see that they come," added Jennie.

"And I to bring you back," said Dr. Conway, who was too intent upon salting his eggs to show anybody his eyes.

"No, you may stay here to welcome the triumphal procession. Mr. Dean and I are able to execute the capture, if it is feasible," said Jennie, positively.

"We are so very captivating," added Bob.

"And what shall I do?" inquired Mrs. Dean, humbly.

"You may help me make the salads and custard for dinner," said Mrs. Brown.

"And I shall kiss Miss Mary when she comes," put in Mr. Brown. "Wonder if any body would like to swap jobs with me, hey? Ki! ki! ki!"

Bob Dean's face was not cool under the suggestion, while Dr. Conway's was a study; and Jennie studied it, too.

"What time shall we start, Miss Jennie?" asked Bob.

"Oh, pretty soon. I've several little things to do first."

"I am at your service when you are ready."

"All right."

This, by ears polite, considered a slang phrase, was a favorite one in that young lady's vocabulary.

The plan so expeditiously arranged to have the designated company to dinner, was considered by each member of the breakfast-table assemblage, Mr. Brown perhaps excepted, as an event of no little moment; but by each viewed in a peculiar and rather personal light.

As soon as the thought was suggested by Mrs. Brown, they all understood that it had been already well weighed and decided, only remaining to be executed. To dispose of the events of every-day life in this summary manner was her habit, and her friends knew that, though only mentioned as a passing idea, nothing was left for them but to find the most pleasant way to carry it out.

When the others had left the room, Jennie went to her mother's side. Mrs. Brown was making an exhaustive survey of her well-stored sweetmeat pantry, with the view of deciding between currant- and apple-jelly as a sauce for her turkey.

"Mamma, is it a good idea to have Mary come so soon? Will it be pleasant and easy?"

She is pouting, and her big eyes look anxious; altogether unlike the Jennie who, five minutes ago, was so heartily concurring in the plans for the day.

"Good idea? Why not? Humph! that apple-jelly is rather dark." She thrusts the end of her little finger into the jar, and carries a sample to her mouth. "But it tastes good, though."

"Well, you know, mamma—the Doctor—maybe he—or she—won't feel easy."

"Don't see the point. Besides, he's got to see her some time; why not to-day? I am not going to let his likes or dislikes keep *my* old friends out of my house. Jennie, *would* you have currant or apple?"

"Currant, I think, by all means. But that is not what I mean, mamma; it is not his *dislike* I am thinking about—"

"Tut! tut! don't you be uneasy. Anybody with eyes in his head need n't want to see anything prettier than you are this week. Anyway, I am sure that Mary knows all about

that Agnes Vinson scrape, and how he got shot, too. I know it from the way she and Mrs. Lipscomb looked, when it was mentioned before them the other day. I suppose Laura has told them."

"Oh, mamma! what would I not give if that thing had never happened. Nobody but us will ever see it in its true light, and he will be blamed so much more than he deserves."

"I don't know so well about that. Everybody has a different idea of the code of honor. He is considerably whipped under it, and a heap easier to manage than if it had n't have happened."

Jennie was not satisfied. Her loyal heart was beginning to yearn to have her lover honored by others; though, in truth, she knew there was little enough in him to honor, except his princely person. Yet, while she realized the truth, she could not help anticipating the time when her husband should be esteemed as a nobleman among men. Poor little woman! flippant and vain and selfish, yet with the mainspring of womanly love beginning to move the machinery of her being. Poor little Jennie! worshipping her gilded image, made in the similitude of a very god, but lacking the attribute of a soul. Will she be able to winnow, through these growing impulses, any sound wheat from the great sheaf of chaff that he is? and, it being sown, live to see it bring forth even a scanty harvest of noble thought and deeds? Or, will there be only rag-weed and thistle forever in the garden of her love? God only knows. Poor, poor Jennie!

Bob and his mother discuss the subject up-stairs. She is making his room particularly nice, because she intends having the honored guests pay them a visit up here, too; and Bob's room has the sunniest window and the best view.

She brought him a splendid geranium in full bloom, when

she came, and this is surrounded, on its rustic stand, by pots of great double-belled hyacinths, which perfume the air with their glory of blossoms.

Such a change his room has had since her deft fingers have handled its contents! She has a passion for working the monogram "B. D.;" pillow-shams, doilies, splasher-tidies, rugs, and towels, tell the tale, whichever way you turn. This weakness of his mother's is the only thing Bob has ever found in her which he does not approve. He feels that the constantly recurring B. D.'s take all the individuality out of him; but she delights in them, and he tries hard not to show that he does not. Standing by the floral window, tapping on the pane, he asks:

"Do you think she will come, mother?"

"I don't know—" She paused and joined him at the window, plucking a sere leaf from the geranium.

"I don't believe she will. It will not be pleasant for her to meet Dr. Conway now."

"But she will have to meet him some time, and procrastinating the unpleasant ordeal will not render it less painful, and I hope she will have wisdom enough to see that."

"I wish I could help her to bear the unpleasantness."

"I think you are carrying your share," she said with a slight laugh; then serious again, she added, "but you can help her by not seeing it is a shock."

"Oh, yes, I understand; but I tremble for her and pray for her."

"Bob, Jennie is only half happy in her engagement. It would not be a strange thing if nothing ever came of it after all."

"I place no faith in Dr. Conway's constancy. If he found it suited his interest best, he would break his vows to her as

easily as he flips the ash from his scented Havana. He does not love Jennie."

A tap at the door—

"I am ready, Mr. Dean."

Jennie was brightness, coyness, and sweetness personified as she stood awaiting Bob's exit, with fur turban fringed by her jetty curls, and short dress janty and perfect. Dr. Conway, in his door opposite, surely thought so, Bob's opinion to the contrary, and, stepping to her side, said:

"Sweet one, I'll give you this for a kiss."

He slipped a diamond ring on her finger, and, gathering her in his arms, pressed his bearded mouth to her dewy lips. She barely had time to right her dishevelled hat when Bob came out, and, taking in the whole situation at a glance, diamond and all, said, with a knowing and friendly smile:

"Somebody is blooming sweetly this morning. I'd wear fur on my head and jewels on my hand all the time, if I were you, Miss Jennie; it makes you look so rosy. Doctor, are not you a little envious of our ride?"

"I am in despair," he answered, lifting the moustaches from his lip where Jennie's kiss was still thrilling.

"Try to bear your lot like a man and a Roman," said Bob; and, taking the little hand so conscious of its new thraldom, he led her down-stairs and out to the buggy waiting at the gate.

She is pulling a glove on the ringed hand, and looks very serious as they drive off; and when Button has taken a round pace down the street she says, softly:

"Mr. Dean, do you think it possible for a very little thing, or person—who is little in every way, body and soul and mind—by constantly trying to get larger, and being very near to some other better and bigger thing, or person, to really

develop and grow to be capable of greater thoughts and deeds than would naturally fit it at first?"

Bob pondered over her words a moment before he answered.

"Whenever that thing—or person—let us say person, for convenience, Miss Jennie—has begun to think herself small, and to *wish* to grow larger, the growth has already begun."

She looked at him and drew a long breath, putting her gloved hand over her heart.

"Sometimes I feel now—I mean that person feels"—a twinkle in her arch eyes—"as if she were expanding a tiny bit now—just the least imaginable bit, remember; and then she grows so narrow and suspicious and selfish—ugh!" She made a grimace, and struck the naughty heart a sharp blow.

"You touch the key-note of the difficulty when you say 'selfish,' for selfishness is the bane of all expansion of character. If you will keep the head of that noxious weed cut down, suspicion, jealousy, and all the rest of that family of narrowness will die a natural death."

"But it is hard to keep down. Like the poison Nightshade, it grows in the dark; while you are not thinking, it is spreading all over your garden, and the first thing you know it has scattered its seeds around it."

"Yes, but it grows only in the dark; and you must keep the night out of your spiritual garden, by letting the sun of faith and love shine there all the time. Keep planting good seeds, too, and diligently cherish the tender plants of grace that spring up, and eventually they will bear fruit meet for eternal life.

She shook her head sadly, saying:

"Oh, but I am so little and weak—all of me but the selfish part."

"But the great Gardener, who has implanted these noble impulses in your heart, is strong to help."

A tearful, trusting face is turned to him; but she makes no answer, so he continues:

"Little friend, you have the greatest of human work before you now, a precious charge laid at your door—that of beginning a life of usefulness, of training a brave, buoyant, young heart to meet the Divine will. And another task, not less important, nor easier to accomplish—to lead in the heavenly way one who, all his life, has been straying afar from his Father's house."

There is no time for Jennie to answer his words, for they are now at Mrs. Lipscomb's gate. While Bob is fastening Button to the hitch-post, they see Mary go out of a side door, into the yard, with a great yellow bowl in her arms. She has not seen them, and calls, "chick, chick, chick," while a multitude of fowls scramble from every direction for the grain she scatters. Her dark morning wrapper and sun-bonnet are not able to make her homely, Bob thinks, as he and Jennie meet her surprised eyes. They do not go into the house, but join her and her feathered friends, and state their errand. She receives Mrs. Brown's message with a startled, pained look; but after thinking a moment, says:

"If mother wishes, we will go."

Bob is almost sorry of the arrangement, as he notes her ready acquiescence in what is evidently a plan of doubtful pleasure to her. They go together into the sitting-room, and Mary leaves them to bring her mother, who presently comes in. She is at first uncertain about the prudence of the step, but allows herself to be persuaded, and finally consents.

"I am so glad, Mrs. Lipscomb! I am sure it will do you

no harm. You and Mr. Dean will go on in the buggy, and by-and-by Mary and I will walk on."

"No, no, Miss Jennie," protests Bob; "you or Miss Mary ride, or both, for there is room for three, and I will walk. Having loaded you up, I shall be there in time to assist in the descent of the august body, provided you move with the dignity and deliberation becoming the honorable embassy."

"You forget that that was the part of the day's ceremonies assigned to Dr. Conway. No, you were sent for Mrs. Lipscomb, and I to see that she came. It was your own suggestion, too,"—she dropped her voice,—"please let me have my way just this once."

So it is settled, and, when Mrs. Lipscomb is dressed a little more, he takes her out to the buggy.

"Jennie, will you sit here a little while, or would you prefer to come to my room with me while I dress," asked Mary.

"I will go with you if you do not mind."

Seated by the dressing-table, she watches Mary comb out the beautiful hair, which seems to caress the white fingers as they arrange its shining coils. She wishes she knew how to tell Mary of her engagement, with which her own heart is so full that she cannot forget it one instant. But it is difficult to do; she feels that her keen perceptions are not in error in judging Mary to have been far from indifferent towards Dr. Conway; but as to the extent or depth of her feeling she is totally ignorant, and Mary's dignity and simplicity forbid the probe of jest or light question. Jennie honors Mary Lipscomb with an intense admiration, and with those newly-aroused impulses for a broader and better life, exalts her to a standard to be imitated. She has a feeling of having wronged her, too, in a measure, by winning entirely to herself a heart

which had been divided between them. No clear perception has she of the relation which has existed between the Doctor and her friend, but that it was of a confidential nature she feels sure, and she would like to know more. She ventures a leading remark.

"What a curious child that Laura Vinson is."

"Yes, to those who do not know her, she does seem strange; but she is very true and faithful to those she loves."

"She is as devoted to you as a spaniel to its master. When you sent that letter to Dr. Conway, last week, do you believe she would not let a soul in the house touch it until she put it into his own hands?"

Mary turned quickly from her to the closet to get her dress, where, with her back towards her guest, she took down and replaced several articles; but when, after a moment, she spoke, her voice was quiet and non-committal.

"Yes, I told her to give it to him, herself. It was important he should have it without delay. Jennie, shall I wear my black cashmere or this maroon suit?"

"You always look best in black, I think."

"I know I feel better dressed in it. Has the Doctor recovered sufficiently to leave his room?"

No one could have surmised from her tone that the question was one of moment to her.

"Oh, yes, he came down-stairs yesterday, looking handsome and more interesting than ever."

"That is hard to conceive," said Mary, smiling. "Well, I believe I am ready, except to see Laura a moment."

Left alone, Jennie is deep in thought, with her gloved diamond pressed against her lips.

"I don't believe she cares for him. I've a mind to tell her, and have her sympathy and confidence and help."

She drew off her left glove, and, when Mary returned, exhibited the glittering jewel under pretext of waving the curls on her forehead. It caught the eye of her friend immediately, who asked:

"Why, a New Year's gift? You did not tell me about it. Your papa is so generous; it is beautiful."

She took the soft brown hand in hers to examine. With crimson cheeks Jennie raised shy eyes to her face and murmured:

"Papa did n't give it to me. It is my engagement-ring; *he* put it there this morning."

"Who, Jennie? Not Mr. Dean?" A sharp pain of disappointment struck her like a shock.

"Mr. Dean! Oh, Mary, no! Of course not; he—Dr. Conway, I mean. Why, don't you know?"

"*Dr. Conway!* Is it possible?"

A keener, sharper shock now. Could it be possible he had found comfort already? had transferred to another his unchanging (?) love in less than a week from the time she declined it? Surely her idol had been less than clay, mere stubble of the field, fickle as well as false.

There is no disappointment so full of chagrin to the merely human part of human nature as an easily-transferred affection, though that affection be a rejected one. We are all a little dog-in-the-mangerish about our love affairs, and are gratified at having a cast-off suitor remain disconsolate at least a decent while after the rupture of his bondage to us.

Jennie looked wonderingly at her friend's startled eyes, and, laying her pretty head on her bosom, said:

"Are n't you glad for me? Oh, he is so handsome, so grand, and so devoted to me. He is half wild with jealousy if I am out of his sight."

She put up her childish lips for a kiss, but Mary could not find it in her heart to meet them with her own. She pressed Jennie to her bosom and stroked back her curls in silence until tears came to the big black eyes.

"You won't say you are glad," she whispered. "You are just like Mr. Dean, who does not think Doctor is good enough for me; but oh, Mary, he is a great deal fonder and better than you all know. You will see by-and-by. You will see what he will be."

"Bless your trusting heart, dearest Jennie, and may you be very happy, child, as happy as you deserve."

She kissed her now; then they went out and down the street together, and Jennie poured out her full heart to her, not noticing that Mary gave few answers and little heed to her words.

Mary was probing her own heart, and measuring Jennie's lover by the standard she had once erected for her own. Could Dr. Conway measure to it? Could he have been one and the same with it? Nay, verily—never, save in her own imagination. On the whole, she was glad Jennie had told her this morning, for the revelation enabled her to tear away from her heart the last coil of bondage, and step forth a free woman; but not unscathed, for the spirit was sore and smarting under the print of the chain.

She did not fear to meet him, now.

Her new strength was to be tested immediately, for the Doctor and Mrs. Dean met them on the porch. Mary kissed the latter, and dextrously taking her side furthest from the Doctor, bowed to him, and congratulated him on his recovery. He thanked her, and inquired how she had passed the holidays; and then Jennie took her to her chamber, to remove her hat and shawl and find Mrs. Lipscomb, whom Mrs. Brown had put to bed on a lounge.

The morning passed, as such pleasant occasions usually do, and the dinner was bounteous and elegant. After coffee was served, and they were about to leave the dining-room, Mrs. Dean begged that they would all pass the afternoon in her rooms. So they went up-stairs.

Now, if ever a sunny, south room looked cheery, the very presence of comfort and content pervading, Bob Dean's room had that look this New Year's afternoon. And how the talk did run! The flowers came in for a share at first; and, being under discussion, it was fitting their owner should display his generosity. He cut a bunch of scarlet geranium and some fragrant leaves from another plant for Jennie, and assayed to dress up her curls therewith; but these being short, the flowers fell out. Then Bob went to a drawer, and taking out a piece of red ribbon—they all watching in silence—cut off a desirable length, and made, what the Scotch would call, a "snood" for the jetty locks; which answered the end sought, by confining the posy.

Dr. Conway was an interested observer.

Bob, having suited himself, led Jennie to the mirror to note the effect, and standing behind her, made a low bow to her laughing image in the glass.

She lifted her hand to replace a tumbled curl, and the brilliant flashed into sight. Beyond her reflection and Bob's was the Doctor's in the background, and their eyes met as the diamond gleamed. She was startled to see that the look they gave her was not love, so much as something else. Was it jealousy, or was it only a calculating measurement of the value of the stone, and its effect on her person? Quick as thought she faced round and shot him a glance charged with indignation—he should not dare look at her in that way! Oh! she was mistaken—'t was the distortion produced by the

mirror; he was smiling and fond, and she had misjudged him.

Now Bob cuts some flowers for Mary. First, a cluster of sea-shell tinted hyacinth bells for her throat, then a fairy-like spray of begonia for her dark hair. He did not offer to put them in place as he had Jennie's, but handed them to her with a look that, if it meant anything, plainly said they were not half fair enough for her.

Then they fell to talking about the pictures, of which there are not a few in the room. One there is of peculiar beauty. Its centre foreground is a road, winding under huge and hoary live-oaks, from whose branches pend sombre banners of Spanish moss; to the left is a low white fence, with ample gate, enclosing a lawn, which, for greenness and great trees and broad repose, might pertain to an English manor; nor would the mansion-house beyond do violence to the thought, for its tall columns and spacious verandas are in keeping with that effect. But the fairest view is on the right; here, a stone fence, half its length fallen down, the rest brown and lichen-grown, margins a wild ravine, in whose rugged sides the hardy mountain-cedar and chittim-wood find a scanty footing amid the ferns and bramble. Through a rift in the green is an enchanting glimpse of a fair city's suburbs; the gleaming spire of Gothic church on the greensward, far distant, in the midst of picturesque residences, and a few buildings of more imposing magnitude, make up a scene which the observer would say is too fair to be copied from nature, without the addenda of an artist's day-dream.

So thought Mary Lipscomb, for, after studying it a while, she sighed, and said:

"It is a pity that so beautiful a view cannot be seen at one time, in reality. Where do you suppose the scene is intended to be laid, Mr. Dean? Somewhere in Europe?"

He turned to his mother, and smiled before answering:

"No, Miss Mary; not in Europe. And you can really see all of that, and much more, for which there was no room on the canvas, by making less than two days' journey."

"Is it copied from nature, then? and is there such lovely nature in this country?"

"It is a very true picture, not in the least exaggerated, of one of our beautiful views, within a few minutes' drive of Austin."

"You don't say so, Dean?" said the Doctor, getting up to examine it more closely. "I don't remember ever to have seen anything like that about Austin."

"Then you never drove out beyond the old military institute, by Governor Pease's residence, which this house on the left represents. The picture is taken from a point just a little to the south of the residence, and, as I said, does not more than do justice to nature, which here assumes one of her most coquettish and enchanting phases."

"Who painted the picture, Mr. Dean?" asked Jennie.

"A lady friend of mine, in Austin, who is quite a fair artist," he answered, with a slight change of color.

"Ha! is it the same you told me of before?" asked Dr. Conway. "Beatrice—something. What have you done with that picture of her you had here? Come, let the ladies see her!"

Bob did not answer, and evidently had no intention of gratifying the Doctor, until Mary and Jennie added their solicitations, when he brought it and put it in the latter's hand, turning to take a view from the window.

They all gathered around it, and Dr. Conway repeated what Bob had told him about it on the former occasion, adding that he half-way believed the fair artist had limned her image on Bob's heart, as well as on the bit of canvas.

Bob really blushed, but he laughed and disclaimed any affection more tender than such a very warm friendship as would naturally grow between persons of like taste and literary fancies, who are a good deal together in their work.

"She has such an interesting face," said Mary, thoughtfully regarding the portrait.

"She is very interesting herself," said Mrs. Dean; "there is nothing, whatever, common-place or ordinary about her."

Now, Mary turned that thoughtful gaze on Bob, and her eyes, of themselves, made him blush again. Dr. Conway looked at her and nodded significantly.

Mary was almost confirmed in her opinion that he had already selected his wife, and she weighed the matter in her mind all the rest of the day.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SOME MORE PICTURES AND THE ARTIST.

ON the Monday morning after the events of the last chapter, the town of C—— laid aside its holiday air, and put on its working apparel.

Bob Dean trod the path leading to *his* work, with uplifted head and expanded chest, humming a tune. Life had taken a brighter shade since his last walk over this road. He remembers with exultation how gloomy his thoughts were that Friday afternoon. Now his mother is with him, to leave him no more. Then he could not even surmise how this end was to be attained, except by many days of hard labor and patient waiting. Now he has a little fortune of his own; then he

feared to buy a new book or a piece of music, lest the price be needed for a matter of necessity.

That troublesome affair of Agnes Vinson has been brought to a comparatively satisfactory state; he has been the instrument of good to the Lord's poor, and is thankful for that. And Dr. Conway is engaged to be married to Jennie; this is not altogether satisfactory, but perhaps, under the circumstances, the best thing for all parties. And *Mary Lipscomb* is free! This is the burden, the chorus to the thanksgiving hymn his buoyant heart is ever unconsciously chanting—"Mary is free!"

The boys came down the path to meet him, and his happy eyes and heartsome voice divide joy with them.

Mary goes to work, too, this morning. Her sky is not so bright as his, though she feels that she ought to be very grateful, for is not her mother well again? and her music-class is increased, and she has two friends to cheer and love her, whom she did not know a year ago.

But she has no lover now; no love dreams to dream; no rosy future to build and wait for, and the fair, bright world looks very empty. It must forever be thus—to teach, make money to live on, use it, take care of her mother—and that is all. No, not quite all; for she meant to study this year and the coming ones, and grow wiser every day.

There were so many things she did not know; she never conversed with Mr. Dean or his mother without being conscious of the shallowness of her education. Not that they were given to pedantry, or even knew she felt any lack, but some allusion would indicate a thought or a theme she could hardly follow. She had read but a few books, but these she had mastered, and she intended to get more and read them.

Buck McQuillan sets to work this Monday morning to clear

a particularly rough piece of mesquite prairie. The thorny branches pierce his flesh, and the gnarled and flinty roots foil his lusty strength many times over; but he takes delight in the difficulty of his labor, and crushes through the barriers, one by one, conquering a space as each hour passes by. He is too matter-of-fact to think of comparing his mesquite field to the difficulties which beset his moral path, and to dream of finally mastering these as he is doing that, but he is conscious that there is no solace like labor for a "mind diseased." So he digs and chops, saying:

"'T ain't no use grievin' 'bout it—I reckin 't wan't intended fur me to have Aggie, an' I 'll never have nobody else. But I don't blame her, mind, and I 'll love her all the same."

And Agnes crouched over the dirty hearth, and moped and longed to die, while her aunt scolded and toiled for bread for the family.

At Mrs. Brown's there was a very momentous matter under consideration, namely, the preparing for Jennie's wedding. Dr. Conway insisted that it should be consummated as soon as possible—perhaps he feared to trust his fickle will under delay, perhaps he yearned to be handling those thousands of dollars. Jennie made no objection, and Mrs. Brown considered that, the sooner over, the safer. So mother and daughter were holding a weighty council of ways and means, which resulted in their repairing to Mrs. Dean's room, with a purpose to divulge.

That lady, standing beside her bed, whereon were spread lengths of white muslin and paper patterns, was humming a merry little tune for company.

"Are you busy, Mrs. Dean?" asked Mrs. Brown, settling her buxom self in a rocking chair.

"Oh, not very; I must do something to employ myself, so

I concluded to cut out and make a particularly nice set of shirts for Bob. See what a beautiful piece of shirting."

"You did not get it here?"

"Oh, no; I brought it with me in my trunk. But why do you ask me if I am busy? Is there anything that I can do for you?"

"Yes, madam; that is what we came up for just now, to ask you. I want to talk with you, and get your advice about Jennie's *trousseau*."

"Ah!" The word was full of interest, but she waited for something more.

"The stock of goods here is so poor, and high-priced at that—and not much better at Rockdale—we thought it would be a good idea to go to Austin for the things we want."

"A very good idea! There are some elegant stocks to be seen there; almost anything you could wish for the occasion, I think."

"But how to get them? Now, I'll tell you what I would like. You take Jennie, and go over to Austin, and select, buy, and have some of the work done there. I will pay all expenses, of course, and be a thousand times thankful to you besides; for indeed this is no little undertaking for me."

"Oh, it would be only a pleasure for me to do it for you, if you are willing to trust my judgment. As to the expenses, that is a small matter, for I am at home there, you know, and I must go before long, any way, for I left my business unsettled and must attend to it. I am not very experienced in the line of bridal outfits, but I can lend Jennie some assistance, and take her to where she can get all needful advice."

"Oh, Mrs. Dean, I thank you a thousand times," said Jennie, springing from the window-garden to kiss her.

"Not at all, my child. Don't you know that buying

pretty wedding-clothes is a labor dear to the heart of every woman," said Mrs. Dean, stroking Jennie's smooth cheek lovingly.

"Jennie is to have all she wants, nice, and you need not be stinted in the price. The Doctor intends to take a pretty long trip,—perhaps go to Virginia to see his old friends before they return,—and pa and I want her to make a good appearance."

"She is sure to do that, no matter what she wears," said Mrs. Dean, smiling.

"Thanks!" Jennie swept her a bow. "Yet you cannot deny that nice clothes are an improvement even to the best-looking girls."

They fall to discussing busily, time, material, and quantity, styles, and other elements that form items in a wedding outfit.

"There is one thing I wish, which I fear I shall not be able to have," said Jennie, by-and-by.

"What is that? You shall have it, if it can be gotten," answered her mother.

"Money won't get it, though. I want Mary Lipscomb to go with us too."

"The very idea!" exclaimed Mrs. Dean. "She needs the change and rest, and would enjoy the trip so much."

"Well, maybe she will go. We will run around after dinner and ask her."

This they did; and, Mary being out, had time to win Mrs. Lipscomb over to their side before her return, by representing that she was looking pale and careworn, and would doubtless be much benefited by the excursion. When the subject was presented to Mary, she looked wistful over it a moment, showing what a pleasure it would be; then pronounced it "impossible."

"Why impossible, my lady?" queried Jennie.

"I could not leave mother."

"Oh, yes, I should get along nicely with Laura."

"I will have Bob come over for company whenever she wants him," said Mrs. Dean.

"The expense—I cannot afford it now."

"I propose to pay the expense of this excursion, and if I offer you a ticket, you might reciprocate by the favor of your company," said Mrs. Brown, nodding her head.

"Besides," said Mrs. Dean, "the expense will be trifling. Mrs. Brown will send us over to Rockdale in a hack; the fare to Austin is less than three dollars, and when we get there we will go to my boarding-house. My rooms are furnished just like I left them, and Mrs. Goff, the landlady, is a dear friend of mine, and will be delighted to have us with her."

"Don't say no, please, Mary," plead Jennie.

"She will go," said Mrs. Lipscomb. "I wish you to, daughter."

Mary looked doubtful, but said no more, whereupon the three lady guests thanked her, taking her consent for granted.

So it was settled, and they were to go the next day but one.

The west side of Congress Avenue, city of Austin, was a panorama of active life on the afternoon of the sixth of January, eighteen hundred and seventy-nine. Though the weather was chill and the heavens grey and cheerless, many ladies, fur-clad and busy, were to be seen among the brisk pedestrians.

Proceeding up the street, with numerous small packages in their arms, were our three friends from C——. They had been improving the morning hours with merchants and mil-

liners and dressmakers; now, having had their heavy packages sent up before, were, at three o'clock P. M., going home to their dinner, weary, but happy. Their nearest way was through the capitol grounds.

"Can't we go up those steps and get a nice view?" asked Mary, pointing to the broad flight approaching the capitol building.

"Oh, yes," responded Mrs. Dean, turning that way.

"But, dear me, we are so tired," was Jennie's plaint. "My feet and back ache already, and our arms are too full of bundles to climb gracefully."

"That is so. We will wait until we are coming down in the morning, and then we can go all through the house—the Senate and Representative halls, and the offices. I see they are cleaning up, preparing for the Legislature, which convenes next month. We can get a beautiful view of the avenue and bridge at the foot from the vestibule up there, where the Alamo monument stands."

A tall, slight lady, closely veiled, approaches them as they stand talking, and is about to pass, when she turns, exclaiming, doubtfully:

"*Is* it Mrs. Dean?"

As she speaks she raises her gray silk veil, exposing a white face which echoed the question:

"Yes, it is I, Leone. How are you? I am so glad to meet you." She kisses her and turns to the girls. "Permit me to present my friends, Miss Brown and Miss Lipscomb, Miss Rubioli."

Miss Rubioli acknowledges with a bow, and asks:

"But when did you come? I heard you were not coming back so soon; and did Mr. Bob come?"

"I arrived yesterday, but am going back in a few days.

Bob is in C——. We, that is, I and these young ladies, are down on a shopping expedition."

"Where are you stopping? Can't you come home with me? Of course you will."

"We are at my old boarding-place, Mrs. D. Goff's, north of the capitol. It will not be convenient for us to go with you to-day, but you must come up to see me. We are just going up to dinner now."

"Then I will no longer detain you, but will come up after a little. I've a hundred questions to ask you. Good-bye."

"I shall try to answer them; but you must put them one at a time, which you never do. Be sure to come."

"She is a very interesting young lady, and I am glad we met her," said Mrs. Dean, when they had gone a few steps.

"She is very like some one I have seen before," said Mary, thoughtfully.

A little later they had finished their dinner, and were resting in easy-chairs about the cheerful fire, opening packages of "lovely things," and discussing their day's work, and the comparative beauty of pearl silk and silver-gray, duchesse lace and fringe, when there came a double knock, and the hostess showed in Miss Rubioli. Mrs. Dean removed her wraps and seated her by the fire.

Now, Mary, looking at her with her hat removed, remembers where she has seen the face before. She turns to look at Jennie, who catches her thought and remembers, too, for she softly whispers, "Beatrice."

Yes; it was she—and very like the picture, too. The same intense, deep eyes, Italian features, and sensitive mouth. She is very pale—almost sallow, and every muscle of her face speaks of alertness, amounting to a degree of unrest, which is curiously at variance with a manner of immovable repose.

She looks, indeed, all the while, as if she were verily a picture taken from a vehement life, where the face only was alive.

"And how do you like to stay at C——; or, indeed, anywhere away from here?" she asked, her restless eyes roving all over the room and its inmates, and resting, with an artist's appreciation of beauty in form and color, on the two girls opposite her, surrounded as they were with the pretty things they had been buying, and which there had been no time to put out of sight. Neither of them ever looked so pretty as, when near together, they each set off and complimented the other's contrasting charms. And the work on which they were now engaged, enhanced, by its enchanting nature, those very charms; for what woman, not jealous-hearted, but has her heart stirred to its depths by the sight and handling of wedding-clothes—such beautiful wedding-clothes, bought regardless of price, with only taste and fitness to be considered.

"I like C—— very much, indeed," said Mrs. Dean, answering Miss Rubioli's question. "I should be an ingrate not to, for every one has bestowed unparalleled kindness on me; and then Bob is there," she added, with a smile.

A responsive light leaped into Miss Rubioli's eyes, which might have meant that any one should be happy where Bob Dean was—or it might have meant something else; but Mary thought the former.

"Still, it is not Austin; and you know we are like the Bostonians, in thinking any place out of our city must bring a comparative disappointment."

"I did not know the Austin people were so clannish," said Mary, smiling.

"We don't talk much about it before strangers, for it is not the most polite thing to do; but people who have ever lived

here cannot be entirely satisfied anywhere else, permanently. They always hope to come back, if they never get to attain it."

"Now I remember, Mrs. Dean, that you once spoke of an earnest desire to have your home here soon again," said Mary; and they all laughed.

"Of course she does," Miss Rubioli answered, while she watched the beautiful curves and dimples playing around Mary's mouth.

"I suppose I must plead guilty," said Mrs. Dean. "The place *is* very dear to me. I came here a happy bride, suffered as a lonely, wronged widow, worked and rejoiced as a blessed mother, and have been loved and helped by the kindest people in the world. I ought to love the place."

"And you would prefer it if none of that were true, just for the place itself," interrupted her friend.

"To what special feature do you attribute its charms?" asked Jennie, who had been a silent but interested listener.

"That I cannot tell. Good society, freedom from conventionality, beauty of scenery, fine drives, cosmopolitan customs, are some of the things; but, most of all, perhaps, that it is the capitol city of the great State whose every breath of air wafts freedom on its wings."

While speaking she sat motionless, with thin, pale hands clasped in her lap, making no gestures to emphasize her words, as another would have done. But her face was vivacity personified, the sensitive nostrils and dilated eyes betraying her enthusiasm in the subject.

"Of the beauty of scenery here I have heard Mrs. and Mr. Dean speak until I am quite eager to enjoy it," said Mary. "I have seen some pretty views already, while we were about our business, and Mrs. Dean has promised us to see the outlook from the capitol hill, and perhaps a walk to the bridge

over the river, if we get through our work in time, to-morrow."

"I should like the pleasure of showing some of those beauties to you, Miss Lipscomb. May I not have your company for a drive in my phaeton? I would extend the offer to you all, but our carriage is not at home now. However, I can send for it after to-morrow," said Miss Rubioli, quietly.

"That is good, Mary. I am so much obliged to you, Leone; I take it as a great personal favor. Jennie and I will be at the dressmaker's the better part of to-morrow. We go home next day, you know; but we have no sort of use for Mary, and I so much want her to drive about and enjoy herself."

"Then I shall come for her to-morrow, and keep her all day. I want you all should see my studio," she added, softly.

Mrs. Dean smiled, and, turning to the girls, explained:

"You must know that Leone is an artist, and makes most beautiful pictures, too. By-the-by, do you remember the one I showed you in my room the other day? the one you thought could not be found in nature? 'T is her work."

"Yes," said Jennie; "we know. She is 'Beatrice.'"

The lady flushed a dark red and shot a startled look from her fierce eyes, then dropping them, said in a moved tone:

"Did he show them *that?*"

Mrs. Dean explained how Bob had come to show her picture as well as she could, but the artist seemed much embarrassed.

"Does Mr. Dean enjoy himself where he is living?" she asked, after a pause; "but he is happy anywhere."

"Oh, yes, he is as happy as ever. We have both a pleasant home with Mrs. Brown, the mother of Miss Jennie there; and she is as kind as possible."

"Is there much gayety in C——? But Mr. Dean does not care for balls and such." She was looking at Jennie's white gloves and slippers lying on the table.

"No, he does not attend balls. But these are not for a ball," Mrs. Dean added, following her glance and perceiving her thought. "Jennie, may I tell? Thanks! They are for a wedding which is to transpire soon."

"Indeed! Allow me to congratulate you, Miss Brown, for I perceive, by your very becoming blushes, who is one of the happy parties. Am I acquainted with the other?"

The question trembled on her lips.

"No, I suppose not, though he sometimes comes to Austin. And it is well for your peace of mind that you are not, since he is mortgaged to Jennie, here."

"Is he so fascinating? There will be a charming pair indeed, then."

Much to Jennie's relief, she rose to depart, repeating the engagement for the morning.

She came, according to promise, and took Mary to see many places and things. Once during the morning they stopped to rest the horse and look around on the summit of a hill, where the new Tillotson Institute now stands, south-east of, and overlooking, the fair city. After resting in silence some moments, during which Mary drank in with delight the beauty of the picturesque scenery, Miss Rubioli said, softly:

"The last time I was here Mr. Dean was with me."

Mary looked around quickly, a little startled by the words, for, be the truth known, she was just then thinking of Bob herself. Somehow the grandeur of nature always connected itself with him now. She surprised a secret in the tender eyes of her companion ere the latter had time or thought to banish the truth from their depths.

"You are quite well acquainted with him, I believe?" asked Mary.

"Yes; we have been a great deal together, in our walks and rides, and books and work."

For an instant, and perhaps for the first time in her life, Mary Lipscomb's frank heart was stirred to a thrill of jealousy. Truly great was the privilege this woman enjoyed to be a partner in work and thought with Bob Dean! To be able, through the culture of her mind, to measure thought with his thought, to talk of grand purposes to be sought and ends to be attained! Could *she* ever reach such a height, how blessed she would be! But she very humbly answered:

"I should think any one would be better for being a good deal with him. He is very good and noble, I think."

"Do *you* know him well?" her companion asked, searching her face with those hungry eyes. "Excuse the question, but it is only what you just asked me, you know."

"And I return your answer in part. We have been much together in the sick-room, where his goodness endeared him to us all;" and she gave her the history of her mother's illness, and the watching together during the dreary days and nights.

The other listened eagerly to every word, noted every intonation of the sweet voice sounding his praise, and when she had finished, seemed about to ask a question, which she could never get uttered. After waiting a little for it,—for her lips had twice opened to speak,—Mary changed the subject, and when they went home his name had not been again mentioned.

In the afternoon, with Mrs. Dean and Jennie, Mary went to visit the artist's studio. Miss Rubioli's home seemed to the girls the perfection of grandeur and art. Such a residence

and grounds they had read of, perhaps dreamed about, but never before seen.

When announced, Miss Rubioli sent for them to be shown up to her study at once. This was a quaint, foreign-looking apartment on the west side of the house, with a view from the window of the cedar-clad hills and white cliffs beyond the river.

She had many studies among her art-treasures, some her own, in various stages of completion, some the work of the masters. Among others, conspicuous on its easel yet, was a half-finished oil painting; another "Beatrice de Cenci," into which she had evidently intended to bring her own lineaments again, but changed and so disguised that perhaps our friends would not have thought of herself being the model, except for the chain of previous circumstances. When they turned in its direction she endeavored to divert their attention from it, and presently threw a cloth over it. She had forgotten to do so before, when she had sent for them. There were several covered canvases in a corner.

"Have you finished your picture of 'Old Damos'?" asked Mrs. Dean.

"Yes; it is in the corner there. Just raise the cloth—oh, no! not that—the next one!" and she sprang forward, with the agility of a cat, to rectify the mistake. But not in time to save from view the face behind the shielding cover. It was Bob Dean's kind, true eyes and manly features that looked out at his astonished mother and her friends.

"That is Mr. Bob, as I hope you are able to recognize from my poor efforts. He refused to give me a sitting, and I am only making it from memory; and intend to astonish him with it, just for spite," she exclaimed, having recovered

her equanimity. She stepped back, to allow them to take a better view.

Mary thought that the face must have been deeply imprinted on her memory, to have enabled her to reproduce it so true to life.

Mrs. Dean looked tenderly at the dear eyes, but her own had a hint of surprise and pain in them.

Miss Rubioli now uncovered the next picture, saying:

"Here is Prof. Damos."

"Oh," cried Jennie, "I saw him yesterday, on the street, carrying those papers in front of him. He appeared to be trying to read one of them, and was eating a green cucumber pickle!"

"I expect so," said Mrs. Dean, laughing; "he generally is, when he can get one."

"Who is it, Miss Leone? How piteous he looks!" said Mary.

"He is our vagrant. You know nearly every city has its specialty in that line, and Austin will put hers against any other place for individuality. I am not certain that I have his history aright, but the version I had given me is this:

"He was once a learned professor in a German university, and received appointment to a chair of honor in the United States. He came on, expecting to bring his family after him, soon. But the ship in which they took passage never came to port, and in the fearful suspense of disappointed, but ever-recurring, hope, his reason was dethroned and he became the wreck we see him. How he came in this State, I know not; but he was sent to the lunatic asylum here, and there kept until it was ascertained that he was entirely harmless, and, being very unhappy in confinement, was given the liberty of the streets. In the last letter received from his wife, she

besought him to be careful of his health, and, exposed to a new and changeable climate, never to neglect putting on his overcoat when he went out. I suppose, after the manner of literary men, he was absent-minded.

"The poor creature remembers enough to obey the tender injunction, and puts on all the coats he can get, regardless of whether the thermometer is at zero or ranging in the nineties. He is a—I had liked to have said a common beggar—but will say, very uncommon beggar on our streets now—pitiable indeed—but harmless and amusing in his idiosyncrasies."

"And the papers—why does he carry them?"

"Poor heart! He is always expecting and hoping to see the arrival of the lost vessel which is to bring his dear ones to him. He gathers every one he can find, and, opening it out full size, adds it to the pile which he carries before him like a voluminous apron, until it drops away with age. He tramps all over town, occasionally soliciting that you 'give the professor a dime,' begging a pickle or a handful of damaged fruit, and halting in a convenient doorway, as you see him here, to read his news. Another peculiarity is that he puts forth his hand and touches every white object in his reach; why, I cannot tell, unless it is suggestive to him of paper. Where he sleeps, or what substantial food he eats, no one knows. He usually meets with kindness from all, though boys sometimes annoy and anger him."

"Poor thing!" said Mary, gazing at the picture.

It represented a man of perhaps fifty years, low and heavy of build, with weather-beaten face, and ragged beard and hair. An old, wide hat, torn and limp; spectacles over the faded, blood-shot eyes; several long coats, with the shortest on the top, and his apron of newspapers held before his breast. Seated on a broad stone step, before the plate-glass doors of

an elegant banking-house, he was reading the topmost of his papers, which he held close to his eyes.

"He is always reading the shipping news," said Mrs. Dean.

The artist now replaces the cover over both pictures, and turns to go out. The talk about "Crazy Damos"* had diverted attention from Bob's portrait, but perhaps neither of the quartette had forgotten it, or Miss Rubioli's shock at having it exposed to sight.

"And now come down to the parlor, and let me introduce papa to the young ladies. He will be delighted to see you, Mrs. Dean, for he is an ardent admirer of yours."

Much to the girl's surprise, Mrs. Dean blushed painfully, and answered in some haste:

"Thanks, dear Leone; not to-day. I have yet one piece of business to attend to this afternoon, and must be going immediately. Will you not come to see us again before we leave?"

"When do you go?"

"To-morrow, at 9.30."

"So soon? Can you not stay a day longer?"

"Not this time."

"Then I will call after tea, to-night," which she did, and going into the parlor, asked for Mrs. Dean only.

After the latter had left the room, Jennie said:

"Mary, do you know what I think?"

"Not about everything, puss. What do you think just now, for instance?"

"Well, I just believe that girl is in love with Mr. Dean. I am nearly sure of it."

* The character of Crazy Damos is copied from life—name, person, and history, according to current version; as we see him upon the streets of this city every day.—AUTHOR.

"I rather think so, too."

"Is n't she a curiosity? the strangest manner—so still, and yet so startling."

"She is very interesting."

"Does n't she dress *beautifully?* She must be very wealthy. What an elegant home! and that phaeton and dappled-gray pony are the sweetest things I ever saw. I mean to have a turnout just like it;" and Jennie fell to building air-castles, while she patted her little feet on the hearth.

I am afraid that during the last four days she had not thought so much about growing at her heart, and keeping down the weeds of selfishness therein. But she is young and very pretty, and is buying her wedding-clothes, regardless of cost. Any woman can find excuse for her.

Mary is musing, too—of the ride, and talk on the hill-top, the portraits in the studio, and the burning eyes of the artist lady; her cultivation, her beautiful conversation, her talent, her wealth and grandeur, and her love—for she is sure it is love—for Bob Dean. No wonder if he love her, too. She remembers how loth he was to show her picture that day in his room, or to talk about her. And yet there seemed to her to be a disparity between them; something she could not define—as if their aims in life were different.

Mary is a little homesick, to-night, and is glad she is going back to her mother to-morrow. But she is also glad she came. Oh, how she means to study to improve during this year! It will take her a long time to learn as much as Miss Rubioli knows; but even now Mr. Dean seems to enjoy her society, and perhaps in a short time she may find out a great deal about some of those things he has mentioned to her. He asked her a few days ago if she would like to learn the German language, and offered to teach her, and she had felt too timid

to accept the offer. But to-day she bought the books, and intended to ask him for the proffered help. Miss Rubioli did not speak German; she had said this morning she had no talent for language—hers all lay in painting. Mary knew *she* could never paint; but she read Latin quite well already, and now meant to learn German.

Thus musing, she fell asleep in her chair, to be awakened only by Mrs. Dean's entrance, and her and Jennie's laughter over her drowsiness.

CHAPTER XXX.

"TOO HAPPY FOR ANYTHING."

"LOOK a here, Agnes, I think it's time you was a beginnin' to try to do something. There ain't no rhyme nor reason in you, a settin' here all day long, mopin' jest because you was a fool and did n't know when you was well off, while me and mine are a toilin' and slavin' to git something for us all to eat. Here it's nigh onto the last of January, and not the fust hand's turn have you done to help since ma died. Trouble is one thing, and laziness is another."

"I don't want to eat. You an' the children are welcome to all there is, as fur as I am concerned, if you will just let me alone."

"I've heerd enough of lettin' you alone, and you've got to eat if you live; and the Lord knows you ain't fitten to die, with *your* temper—always in the sulks. Besides, we altogether ain't got money enough to give you a decent buryin'; so, if you are so bad off to die, you had better work a little fust."

The last thrust was too much for even Agnes' stolid nature.

Her sleepy black eyes leaped into flame and anger stained her sallow cheeks as she answered her aunt, who was bustling about, emphasizing her caustic speech by banging into their places the pots and skillets she was washing.

"Well, what do you want me to do? I will try to yearn what I eat while I stay, and if I'm in the way, I'll try to git outen it putty soon. I thought I'd as much right in grandma's house as you had."

"Nobody ain't a disputin' your right in the house; all I ask is for you to help with the work. Me and my little children has to work mighty hard, and we are a gettin' further behind all the time. The corn is out, and there ain't more 'n enough meal for one more day. Miss Griffin, she told me last week if I'd come there and wash for her and the mill-hands, she'd let me have meal 'long till the new corn come in. The weather has been so bad all the week ther hain't been no day fitten to wash till to-day, and it's not much better to-day, for it's bitin' cold. But this is Friday; still I don't see how I can go to-day, for Uncle 'Manuel promised to come and kill the hogs for me by twelve. They're bound to be killed, for there ain't no more corn to feed 'em."

"Do you want me to go wash?" Agnes's tone was surly.

"I guess you will have to do it if it's done; and if we don't wash for her this week, she'll git somebody else, and we'll lose the chance. It *is* awful cold to go out, but you can wrap up and take Johnny to go 'long with you. I'd go myself, but I don't see how I can."

The widow's temper was mollified, and her really kind heart shrank from exposing the girl to the bleak Norther which held sway out of doors. But stern want, which knew no choice, was driving her.

The day was fiercely cold, but no rain fell. It had rained

or sleeted every previous day during that week and the preceding, so that there had been no washing done at Mrs. Griffin's, and the pile of muddy and grease-begrimed clothing was appalling to Agnes, as she toiled over the tub of seething suds. She was weak and prostrated by her long idleness and despondency, and already her breath was shortened by her walk of a mile. The water was hard, and had to be drawn from a well, deep, and exposed to the cruel wind. The shed under which she worked was closed in on the north only, and her wash-pot outside. Her little cousin, who had accompanied her, was much too small to be of any assistance, and she had sent him to the kitchen to keep warm. Her back ached, and so did her heart, but thought was busy. She remembered that Dr. Conway had said she was handsome and graceful, and fit to be a lady with her own house and servants, and a carriage to ride in—*she*, who, standing here in the cold, was washing the dirty clothes of the mill-hands. The idea was too absurd to be pathetic—it was only ridiculous! For the first time she was angry with the Doctor for saying such a thing, and then leaving her to such a life as this.

Why she next thought of Buck's home it is impossible to say. He had built a nice little box-house, on the far side of his father's piece of land, next to her old home, for them to live in together. He gave as a reason for not wanting to make a home with his parents, that "Aggie war n't like other women, always in a streak of gab—she was mostly still like, and he wanted her to have a house of her own, where she could be quiet if she wanted to."

Her aunt's little son had told her last night that there had a tenant moved into the house—a new-comer, whom Buck had hired to help him on the farm. He had a young wife and a sweet little baby, and a sister about grown, who was

"mighty peart lookin'." And they were living in the house Buck had built for her, while she was here washing for bread.

She had been there once last fall, before Dr. Conway began to come to see her grandmother, and she and Buck had selected the place for the garden and the cow-pen, and now, like as not, they would put them somewhere else; and maybe they would cut down some of the elm trees she liked so well, for they grew on the very best cotton-ground.

There was her own red cow and her calf, and last year's heifer to start with, besides three head that Buck had; and now, she reckoned hers would be given in along with her grandma's, and that would be the last of them, for the estate was in debt, and only the homestead could be held, the stock having all been mortgaged. Her mare and colt would have to be turned out on the range, for the corn was out, and that would be the last of *them*, too.

Somehow, she had not thought of all these things while she was at home sitting over the fire. Why could n't she die, and be out of all this trouble? She knew Buck's folks felt hard towards her—and good right they had, too. He had never set eyes on her since he had come back, a good month now. Maybe he had forgotten her, as she had said he must; but the thought made her feel more lonely than ever.

She went to the well for more water. The wind swept her scanty skirts away from her chilled ankles, and her wet hands were chapped and stiff. Buck had told her once that she should never draw herself a bucket of water, after she came to live with him, if he could help it.

The well was very deep, the windlass heavy, and the bucket, half-way up, seemed inclined to slip back; she stopped to get her breath and choke back a sob—

"Let me take it out fur ye, Aggie!"

She started back in fright, and had not another brawny hand held the rope the bucket had surely gone back to the bottom.

"Thank you, Buck. I did n't know you was here."

Her voice was husky, and she did not look at him.

"Neither did I know you was here, 'tell jest then, when I see you a tuggin' at that are heavy bucket. I jest come to see Mr. Griffin about them steers of his'n. What you doin' here?"

"I 'm washin' for Mrs. Griffin."

Her eyes were on the ground, and she swallowed a sob, that his kind tone had brought from under the surface, where her plenteous self-pity had deposited it with a shallow covering of control.

"It 's too cold for you to be out a washin'. No woman hain't no business in this here wind. Does you *have* to do it?" his voice full of yearning pity.

"I suppose so. We are out of meal, and Aunt Polly said I must come," she answered, while her nervous fingers rolled up the corners of her shawl.

"Out of meal! Why did n't she send to our house? Look a-here, Aggie, I can't stand this no longer. I ain't a gwine to stand by and see you treated in no sich a way. I loves you as hard as I ever did, and I allus will, too; but if you can't like me no more I won't bother you with a seein' of me, but you *must* 'low me to pervide for ye, for what I 've got is all your'n, and if you won't make use of it, why I hain't no more heart to work, and that's all of it."

He licked his dry lips, and his red hands trembled on the edge of the freezing bucket, but he was insensible to the cold.

"You 're too good to me, Buck. You always was, and I 've

treated you too mean, but I'm sorry," and she covered her face with her apron and sobbed.

"Oh, Aggie, don't cry. I don't want to give you trouble, honey. I loves you too good for that."

"You are the only one who is good to me, since poor grandma's gone. Everybody else has turned aginst me, and I reckin I deserve it."

"No, don't say that, Aggie; you ain't to blame one bit. Ah! Aggie, if you only could forgit it all, and love me jest a little, like you useter, we could be so happy yit. I'm the same 's if nothin' had happened—could you, honey—jist a little bit?"

Buck's great, true heart thumped like a "muffled drum" against his jeans coat.

"Oh, Buck, I ain't wuth it. I ain't fit for you to have—but—I—do—love you—better than I ever did before—for you are all the friend I've got."

"By jingo! you don't say so; do you, Aggie? I want to holler! I'm the proudest man ever was—and *will* you have me, after all? *Oh, Aggie!*"

When the bucket had been deposited on the bench under the wash-shed, he stopped and said sheepishly:

"Aggie, would you keer, honey, if I was to put my arm 'round ye, a minute? You know you said onct that ye didn't want me to tech ye; but seems 's if I've had sich a aching here, for to feel your head against it," and he laid his coarse, chapped hand on his heaving breast.

The stolid woman was touched now, and laid her head on the true bosom which had loved and borne so much.

The head was enveloped in a shabby old shawl, and her face was swollen and purple with cold; the sacque she wore was greasy and ragged, but that made no matter between

them. She had found protection and tenderness, and his hungry heart was satisfied, while he murmured:

"Oh, Aggie! Oh, honey! I'm too happy for anything. The good Lord bless ye; and I don't forgit to say thankee to Him, too."

The chilled hands were clasped, and the troubled hearts were as truly united as if they had been beating under broadcloth and satin.

The days have tripped along on busy feet, and now February is counting out his sands.

It is evening, and we find our friends again assembled, as they so much love to do, in Mrs. Brown's parlor. Mary and her mother are here, and Mr. Brown is at home, too, to-night. He has taken a drop to warm him up, and is merry therewith.

"Doc, do you remember that feller, Veed, we met at Max's, last time we was down to Rockdale?"

"The fellow who had inherited some money from an uncle or cousin? Yes; I remember him."

"Should think you ought ter. He treated liberal all 'round. Well, what do you think the green done?"

"Can't imagine."

"Should think not. Well, I'll tell you. He went in with 'nother fool, and they put 'em up a skeeting-ranche. Veed, he had the money, and t' other feller, he had experience in the business. Well, they soon skeeted out of all their money, and now Veed has got experience, too. Ki! ki!"

Dr. Conway and Bob joined heartily in the mirth, but the ladies did not get the point.

"What does he mean, Bob?" asked Mrs. Dean.

"A skating-rink," said Bob, laughing.

"Jinse! when you and the Doctor here start off in life

don't you go a-skeetin'," said Jennie's father, taking a good whiff at his pipe.

"Papa!" plead Jennie, while they all laughed once more.

Now, a heavy thump, thump, at the hall-door came to her relief.

Mrs. Brown went out and brought in Buck McQuillan.

He was embarrassed in the presence of the company, upon which he evidently had unwillingly intruded. Shuffling his feet and clearing his throat, he finally said:

"Good-evenin' all."

But he refused the seat Mrs. Brown offered him, and looked foolishly from one to another. As he met Dr. Conway's eyes, he flushed darkly. The Doctor had arisen on Buck's entrance, and now stood behind his chair, pale and expectant. Jennie, who had been on the other side of the room, glided to his side, and her face was white, too. Mary and Mrs. Lipscomb sat still, full of apprehension. Mr. Brown began to seethe with indignation; when Bob came to the relief of all, by giving the intruder his hand.

"You had better have a seat and get warm, Buck. It is right cold out, to-night; is n't it?"

"Yes, sir; it 's putty cold—but I hain't time to set down. I reckin—I 'd like a few words with you, Mr. Dean; but—" he looked doubtfully around.

"Come up to my room, Buck, and we can talk as much as you like, without interrupting our friends here."

He gave Buck a chair, and, when he had mended the fire in his room, laying his hand on the man's shoulder, said:

"And now, what can I do for you, my friend?"

"Well, sir—" he cleared his throat, and thrust his hands deep down into his pockets—"you see—er—well—t' other evening I happened to come up like with Aggie, and—er—

we've fixed it all up betwixt us; and bein' as you and your folks has been so friendly to us, I thought I'd come an' let ye know," and he grinned, and took his hands out of his pockets.

"Is that so? Well, Buck, I am rejoiced for you, and hope you will be as happy as two turtle-doves," said Bob, shaking hands with him.

"Thankee, sir. I am 'bleeged to ye for your good wishes, and don't no ways doubt 'bout bein' happy, for I'll be satisfied jest to do for her, and see her set by. We thought—we'd have it—to come off—next Chewsday, and, if it ain't axin' too much, me and her would be oncommon proud if you and your ma, and Miss Mary and her ma, would come and see it done;" he wriggled and grinned.

"I appreciate the invitation, Buck; but—what hour will it take place? I am pretty well engaged for that day."

"Well, I telled Aggie I did n't expect you would come—but it'll be after dark, I s'pose—say 'bout candle-lighten—I b'lieve that's the right time to be married in; but you see I don't know 'bout these sort o' things; and Aggie, she jest leaves me to have my way 'bout it all—but if any other time would suit you better, we will change it."

The eager look on the red, embarrassed face was ludicrous to see.

"After dark? Well, that is the only time I could come; so it just suits me. I suppose you know, Buck, that Dr. Conway is to be married on the same day, at three o'clock in the afternoon, to Miss Jennie Brown."

Bob spoke tenderly and with caution. It was unnecessary.

"No, sir; I did n't know. But it don't make no matter to me now, what he does; he's made us lots of trouble, but it's all over now, and I don't bear him no grudge."

"That is right, my dear fellow! the true Christian spirit. If you and Agnes commence your life on those principles, and look ever to God, there is no doubt but you will have your share of happiness."

"Yes, sir. Thankee! I s'pose I may tell Aggie you will come, then? and the ladies? And, Mr. Dean, she told me to ax Miss Mary, if it war n't too much trouble, would she come out to see her one day fust. She 's got something on her mind she wants to say to her. I 'd be much obleeged if you would ax her."

The poor fellow was sorely perplexed over all these preliminaries.

"If you will keep your seat a moment, Buck, I will go down and bring her up here, and then we can ask her."

"Well, sir—I 'm kinder 'shamed like—but I suppose I 'd know what to tell Aggie 'bout it then."

When Bob reëntered the parlor he was smiling, but there was in his face a touched look, incomprehensible to the somewhat stiff people who were awaiting his return almost in silence, for conversation had refused to be free any longer.

"Mother, if our friends will excuse you, I should like your company a little while, and, Miss Mary, you may come too, if you please."

"What can you be up to now, Bob?" answered his mother, drawing her shawl about her, preparatory to traversing the cold halls and stairway.

"I will tell you, presently. Miss Mary, will you come?"

"I don't understand. Have you a conspiracy?"

"Something of the kind—or Cupid has."

What a blunder! Jennie caught at the bait.

"I suppose you and Cupid can do no execution without a victim. Mary, I would n't go one step!"

"Forewarned is forearmed," answered Mary, putting her hand into Mrs. Dean's; but her cheeks rivalled a damask rose.

"I believe there is no other prey left, Miss Jennie," retorted Bob.

That shot told, and Jennie was silenced.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HYMENEAL.

THE hymeneal Tuesday dawned bright and soft, as with the breath of coming spring, though it was yet but the second week in February.

Enterprising ploughmen were turning up the brown and pregnant earth, while knavish crows were cawing from budding tree-tops, congratulating themselves upon the early preparation for their own nefarious plunder.

It was a fitting day in which young hearts should mate.

Mary Lipscomb was in her front yard, seeking flowers. Her winter Spirea was in bounteous bloom, and Narcissus and Jonquil blossoms perfumed the air with their musky odor.

She wanted to send Jennie a liberal offering, and yet save Agnes a little bouquet. Her heart was very full as she coupled the two names in her mind. Poor Agnes! Poor Jennie! Yes, poor Jennie. Yet why? Ah, misguided, impulsive Jennie, who would to-day give herself to one wholly unworthy the treasure of a fond woman's heart. But she was not blind to his real character—she understood and forgave

the wrong, and had the courage, for love's sake, to throw her own little self into the balance with his good qualities, if, mayhap, they might be made to outweigh the bad. Would that the sacrifice might not be in vain.

As for Agnes, she was doing the best that remained for her. In telling to Mary that "something on her mind" she had confessed that the memory of her whilom lover, "who was enough like one of them princes you read about," was still, and would ever remain enshrined in her heart of hearts, as a sweet dream of the "might-have-been;" but she gave her every-day love and duty to Buck, who had anchored her affection by his unswerving fidelity and goodness. She would do all she could to be a good wife to him, and make him happy. And she wanted Mary to ask Miss Jennie not to hold the past against her, and to believe that there had never been any criminal relation between her and Dr. Conway.

Of course, her sentiments were not expressed in this language, but it was full of pathos, and took this form in Mary's mind; and Mary's heart was prayerful for the peace and well-doing of the honest and humble couple, who would this day link their lives in one.

Her garden was now shorn of its wealth, and her little basket full of the spoils; and she had turned to go into the house, when Clarence Vaughn called her, from the gate, to receive a message from his mother; the purport of which was, that his lesson be postponed until the following day, as she needed his services. Mary gladly acquiesced, while she shrewdly suspected the request to have been made only that she herself might be left free to attend the weddings.

"Isn't it a beautiful day, Clarence?" said Mary, leaning on the gate, inhaling the sweet air, along with the aroma of her flowers.

"Yes'm; it is lovely;" but he was looking at the roses in Mary's cheeks, and the light in her beautiful eyes, ignoring the charms of nature abroad.

"And a happy one I hope it will be," added she, drawing in a deep breath.

"Yes'm; to those who are happy—I am not;" and he sighed dolefully.

"Why, Clarence! what possible cause can you have to render you unhappy?"

"Miss Mary, it is only three weeks after this one till school is out; then Mr. Dean is going away. I count the days over and over, for I feel like I shall never have another such a friend."

Yes, that was true; nor was this the first time she had thought of it. She had counted the days, too, and felt that never again should *she* have such a friend as he had been. She knew now whence had come a certain cadence of sadness, that pervaded her enjoyment of the loveliness about her.

"We will all miss him, sadly; and his mother, too, whom we have learned to love so much. But I hope they will come back again sometime;" her voice was very dreary.

"Miss Mary, may I tell you something? I am sure you do not approve of gossip—neither do I; but I think, perhaps, you would like to know something that I know."

"Certainly, Clarence; if it is no harm," answered Mary, puzzled.

"There is no harm in the information; but the way in which it was acquired is not so innocent." The lad blushed, but continued: "You know Mr. Dean takes his dinner at the school-house with us boys. Well, yesterday, after we were all done eating, he was sitting at his desk reading, when Steve Laster asked him to show him how to work an example. It

was a hard one, and Mr. Dean had helped me on it in the morning, and I suppose he wanted to see if I remembered his explanations; anyway, he sent Steve to me, and he did not like it. Mr. Dean saw that, but just went on with his reading, taking no notice of him. After a little, he seemed to be thinking of something very pleasant, for he smiled, and wrote a while on a slip of paper, and his face was a sight, for the pride and joy in it. Just then a gentleman rode up, and called him, and he slipped the paper in the book, and laid it on his desk; but when he opened the door, the wind caught the leaves of the book and fluttered them, and the paper blew out, and came right to our feet. Steve picked it up, and—he is a sneak anyhow—he read the writing before he put it back in the book, which he shut up, so that Mr. Dean did not know it had been opened. Well, coming on home, he told me the writing was a love-letter to a lady named Beatrice, and that Mr. Dean had told her in it that he had inherited a big fortune, and was all impatience to claim her as his bride, which he would do as soon as possible. I know Steve had no business to read the letter, nor to tell me, and perhaps I ought not to be repeating it, but I know you like him as well as I, and will be glad to know he is so happy. Sometimes I have thought he was not, he would look so sad at times—but not lately. I am certain he is fond of, and proud of, the lady, for his face showed *that* when he was writing the letter. But I am afraid it only takes him further from us. I once hoped he might find a wife here;" and the boy, laughing, glanced significantly at Mary, while he stopped for breath.

"Oh, Clarence, what nonsense! I *am* glad he is so happy," she answered, but she did not feel entirely honest in saying it. Yet, why should she not be glad to know that he was engaged to the woman he loved?

She had believed for some time that he and Miss Rubioli were lovers; but she had almost forgotten it during this last happy month. When she first returned from Austin, she had frequently mentioned the lady to him, in alluding to things and scenes there, but he always met the name with some hesitation—timidity, it seemed to her, mingled with a measure of pain. So she allowed the subject to drop into silence, and since, they had been so happy, so oblivious in their mutual enjoyment of each other's society.

The German lessons had progressed grandly, and many another bit of learning had been smuggled in, under the opportunity set for them, besides confidential talks about the ambitious future—her hopes of increased knowledge and culture. And he had not told her that she knew enough, and was the perfection of culture already, as some other men would have done, but encouraged her to strive upward in these things, adding that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"—that all greatness that was at the sacrifice of spiritual growth was poison to the soul, and would turn into bitterness. They were wholly agreed on these topics, but she found herself constantly looking to him for strength and encouragement. Never before had religion seemed so beautiful, so applicable to every-day work.

Then his hopes and plans came in for discussion. He, too, was ambitious—to attain the perfection in his profession; and she believed he would do it. So they had really been helping each other—"measuring thought to thought," as she had once said, in envious mind, about Miss Rubioli.

All this while they had never stepped on to the bounds of the sacred domain of love. Mary had grown ashamed of her "first great passion"—pitiable plight for a proud, sensible woman.

And Bob breathed not a word about love.

Mary had taken up an idea that Miss Rubioli's wealth created a barrier between her and Bob, which his pride would not overstep; that he would wait until he had mastered his profession, and acquired money before seeking her hand. And now it seemed he had inherited a fortune, and the barrier was laid down; he only waited to complete his obligation to the school trustees, when he would fly to his love.

Ah! what would she do for her friend, when he was gone? Who could ever understand her thoughts and appreciate her needs as he had done? How would her mother do without the dear man to whom she owed her life, and for whose counsel she had learned to wait now, in all matters whether of small or of grave importance?

Would he be happy with his "Beatrice"?

Something there was in the lady which constantly baffled and disappointed her—would he be able to understand, and could he ever find rest under those searching, consuming eyes?

These things have run through her mind, as she stands where Clarence has left her, leaning on the little garden-gate. Now she goes in, with a heavy heart, the sweetness all gone from the sunshine that crowns her beautiful young head. She has known all along that he must go, but she had forgotten. Remembering now, she counts the days that remain, and her heart falls as heavy as lead to the fathomed sea.

Jennie's bridal flowers were sent in due time, and the golden hours slipped by, and then Mary and her mother were in Mrs. Brown's parlor, awaiting the stroke of three and the entrance of the bride.

There came a message for Mary to come to Jennie's room.

In the hall she met Dr. Conway, clad immaculately, his beard in a state of perfection, and his spirits unperturbed.

Mary herself had never looked better in her life. Her best dress, only a delicate cashmere, was exactly the needful setting for her sweet, thoughtful face, which, this afternoon, wore an unusual gravity. Her only ornament, of material substance, were the clusters of white Spirea at her throat and in her gleaming hair.

"Good evening, Doctor," she said, offering him her hand.

"Miss Mary!" his gloved fingers closed tightly on hers, and his leonine eyes were impressive. If he had meant to move her, by his ardent manner, to a regret that she had thrown away a chance for such a splendid husband, he signally failed in his object; for she only found herself amused that Dr. Conway should try to flirt on the eve of his wedding hour, and she rejoiced in her freedom from any thraldom to him. If she should ever again fall under the bonds of love, she meant it should be to an honorable man.

Jennie was as pretty as could be expected of a very pretty girl, dressed for her wedding. She was not doubtful of herself either, but had full confidence in her ability to steer the future.

Mrs. Dean, Bob, and several other friends, were assembled to witness the ceremony, and "all went merry as marriage bells."

The lunch afterward did honor to even Mrs. Brown's *cuisine;* and then came the parting.

Nobody was allowed to cry, for Mrs. Brown was a sensible woman and had counted the cost beforehand, and Jennie could not think of making her handsome eyes red and ugly. Besides, they would only be absent a few weeks, when they would return to make their home with *Pater familias.* Jennie's parents desired this arrangement, and Dr. Conway was quite willing to be relieved from the burden of a personal establishment.

They were gone and Mrs. Lipscomb and Mary were ready to go home.

"Bob," said his mother, "have you finished that new book? I want Mary to read it."

"Yes; I took it to school with me yesterday, and finished it at noon. Shall I bring it? it 's in my room."

"No. You stay. I will bring it."

Mrs. Lipscomb followed her out, to give a few parting words to Mrs. Brown, so Mary and Bob were left alone.

"You will be ready for the *other* wedding when I come for you, Miss Mary?"

What could he mean? Would he choose this time and place, to tell her of his engagement? The blood surged into her face.

Pshaw! What a simpleton she was! Of course he meant Buck's wedding, only he had not promised to take her there; but he had so fallen into the habit of providing for her every pleasure, perhaps he had not thought it necessary to engage her company formally. Her abstracted thought was responsible for her want of ready apprehension.

"Yes, thank you. Six o'clock is the time I believe," she answered.

"I will come at five, if it suits you. The roads are not good, and I would like a little daylight," Bob said, wondering why she blushed.

"Here is the book, Mary," said Mrs. Dean, entering just then. "You will find it very interesting."

"Thank you. Good-bye. Mother, I see, is waiting on the porch for me."

She was glad to get away, and could have cried with vexation at her own stupidity.

At home, she stepped into the sitting-room alone, to

get her breath and collect her wits. Seating herself, she began turning the leaves of her book, but her thoughts were far away from its pages. Bob Dean was going away—he was going to be married, perhaps—she must be glad of it; for she wished him to be happy, but she was nervous and confused whenever she thought of it—what could she do to regain her equanimity? Only banish the whole matter from her thoughts and try to get back her old unconsciousness; enjoy what time was left, then, when he was gone, she would try to take up her life again, and ask God to fill the blank with some good work; the rest she would leave with the Divine burden-bearer.

Sighing, she turned over the leaves of the book in her lap.

"What is this?"

A slip of paper, with pencil writing, and the writing was thus:

"Oh, my love, my love! how can I patiently wait on the tardy pace of time, to bring our hearts together in perfect union? Sometimes I feel as if I cannot, will not, wait, but must break through the distance that divides us and claim the boon, which my heart tells me, will one day be mine. Then will I take my treasure, compared to which my newly-inherited fortune is a bauble—oh, my love—my *Beatrice.*"

Bob had loaned her several books before this one, and was in the habit of putting remarks and notes of explanation for her, on just such little bits of paper as this; it was not folded, and ere she had become aware of its nature, the words had bitten themselves into her heart.

It was all true then. This was the book he had been reading at school, and this the letter the boys had seen—only it was not a letter at all, but a stray bit of paper, on which he had penned his vagrant thoughts—a very foolish thing for a sensible man to do. But the boys' report was certainly true.

He did love fondly, eagerly. How blessed was the woman who had won the treasure! Should she grudge her the blessing? Happy Miss Rubioli!

No, she should try to be thankful for his friendship, and honestly wish him joy.

When Mrs. Dean and Bob came in the hack for her and her mother, she had not quite gotten back her old self; she was quiet and reserved, but her frank face was full of the recently stirred feelings.

Now, Bob's far-seeing eyes took note of this, but he widely missed the truth of its source, in attributing it to the moving of old sentiments, awakened by Dr. Conway's marriage. Was it possible there lingered in her pure heart a tenderness for another woman's husband? The more he dwelt on the thought, the more troubled he became. He knew she would conquer in time, but his hopes, lately so buoyant, sank low, and seemed of distant, if not doubtful, fruition. The old pained look of kept-down trouble settled on his kind face, and he had little to say.

Mrs. Dean readily perceived that something was amiss between them, but not knowing its nature she wisely concluded to cover their discomfiture by keeping up a lively chat with Mrs. Lipscomb. But the party bowling over the rough road, to Buck's wedding, was not as merry as it might have been.

Upon arriving, they found all in readiness, only awaiting their coming. Truly, they were honored guests.

Buck, in his new suit of black, looked as happy and as uncomfortable as possible. Fortunately, he did not know that gloves might be considered essential to a wedding toilet, and, in his case, truly "ignorance was bliss," for had they been added to the other new things he was trying to manage, it is

doubtful whether he had not succumbed to the difficulties which beset his path into matrimony.

Agnes, though nervous, looked handsome, in white muslin, with the flowers Mary had sent her by Laura, at noon.

Poor little Laura was as happy as a songless bird, flitting about here and there waiting on everybody.

The ceremony was performed by the Justice of Peace, to whom the office was new. Of course, he made numerous blunders; but being a man of merit and of method, he each time went back to the beginning, when he found himself out of the track. This manner of procedure, though tedious, and calculated to increase the embarrassment of the parties concerned, was highly gratifying to Buck, who would have been willing to stand on the floor all night marrying Aggie; and, moreover, he was sure that Mr. Crank, the justice, was going to make it good and tight, so that Aggie would be his, and no mistake. But all mundane things must have an end, and so did this marriage service; and the supper following, which, though not so elegant as Mrs. Brown's, was liberal—and the guests were not critical.

Our friends were of the opinion that these two people had as much prospect of conjugal joy in the future as had those two who, by this time, were flying as fast as steam could bear them afar from these familiar scenes.

The young persons were preparing to have some games, or "plays" as they called them, with which to close the evening's pleasure. Bob and his party, after repeating their congratulations, came away, but not until Buck had once more thanked Bob for past favors.

"I tell you, Mr. Dean, if it had n't a been for you, I 'd a been in the territories right now, instid of bein' here, proud as a king."

The homeward ride was rendered lively by discussion of the many interesting events of the day. But when they parted at Mrs. Lipscomb's gate, two young hearts were heavy with imaginary woes.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SHADOWS.

"DEAR FRIEND:—Clarence tells me that you have no other pupil to-day, after his lesson is finished. If it suit your convenience, I will come at five for your German lesson, instead of after tea; my reason for so doing I will state in person. I shall take it for granted that you acquiesce, unless I hear from you, through Clarence, to the contrary.

Truly, etc., B. D."

This note Clarence brought Mary, when he came to his music lesson, on the day after the weddings. It lacked but half an hour of the time appointed, when, his lesson finished, her pupil left; and her exercise was not ready. There had been more than usual to do in her home to-day, as Laura had not yet returned to her duties; and Mary's mind was perturbed, and had not accomplished its labor with accustomed celerity. So, hastily arranging her books, she set to work to finish her translation before her teacher should arrive. Not a dozen words had been written, when her nimble pen was stayed in its course, for her eyes were blinded with hot tears, now raining down on the unwritten sheet. How could she go on in this work, when she remembered how soon it must stop. The dear, patient friend, who had done so much for her—had taught her as no one had ever been taught before;

with such tender care; so exact; so ready to give help, even before she saw its need; so solicitous that she should not overtax her strength, nor encroach too much on her limited leisure hours; yet so exacting that she learn aright all the while, and fall into no error—this teacher would soon be gone, and in the future she must pursue her path of knowledge with thorny labor, and in bare solitude. Could she ever, in the world, learn not to miss him? But this *would* not do; the lesson must be made ready. She dried her eyes, and faithfully struggled through the intricacies of "Hast du hunger? Ich bin schläfrig. Wer macht so viel Lärm?" etc.

The last word was written, the exercise neatly folded, pen wiped and replaced in its case, before the expected tread sounded on the porch. It was her own calm self who met and brought him in.

"Is my pupil tired to-day?" he asked, taking her hand, and leading her to the round table where they worked.

"Oh, no; but I came near not being ready for you. I have been idle this week."

"And I have inconvenienced you by coming earlier. You should have sent a negative by Clarence."

"Oh, not at all; you must not think so."

"I thought that as the Doctor and Jennie were gone, Mrs. Brown might be lonely, and it would be kinder if mother and I were not away to-night. The dear woman has been crying to-day, for all she tries to be so brave."

"You are always thoughtful for others, Mr. Dean. No wonder everybody is your friend."

"Because everybody is kind to me, and I hope I am not ungrateful."

The German lessons were only recited thrice a week, and heretofore Bob and his mother had come after tea on the

allotted evenings, and they two had worked and exchanged their gutturals on one side the table, while their mothers knit or talked at the other, occasionally stopping to laugh at the strange, harsh sounds.

The task went swiftly on to-day, and as Mary gathered together the books, the work being done, she said softly,

"I shall soon now have to learn to work alone, Mr. Dean."

Bob arose hastily and took several turns about the room before he resumed his seat. He could not bear to speak to her of his departure, with so much in his heart untold, that he did not dare to tell.

"You have learned with great aptness, and will be able to go on in acquiring the written language, with such helps as I can give you. But you will scarcely learn to speak German without further opportunity of conversation. You must accustom yourself to reading it aloud, daily."

She is thinking: "Yes, he is trying to show me how to do without him—oh, will I ever learn?"

"And besides," he continued, "I mean to ask you to write to me while I am away, and we can make a part of each letter a lesson."

"I am proverbially a poor correspondent, and I am afraid if I have to write in German, I shall not improve in that capacity."

"But I shall make a practice of putting all my compliments and all my secrets in that tongue, and request an answer in kind."

"I fear your compliments will be ignored, and your secrets remain profound," said Mary, shaking her head.

He thinks he has never seen her look so sweet as she does this afternoon. Her clear eyes so full of intelligence, her face flushed with enjoyment of what she is doing, yet with a

little plaintive touch about the fine mouth that tells of some undercurrent of feeling. For one instant he is on the point of putting his fate to the test, she is so charming in her simple dependence on him. But this very gentleness holds him off, lest he frighten her confidence, and lose what he has gained, by an untimely venture. Had he acted upon the impulse he had saved a deep draught of bitterness.

But his courage failed, and the moment passed unimproved.

"Speaking of letters, mother received one to-day from Miss Rubioli," said he.

"Yes? Is she well?" Mary could not tell why she should tremble so that the words almost betrayed her.

"No, she is not well. She writes that her health is quite indifferent, and her physician has recommended her to go to the country and lay aside her work for a while. In view thereof she wishes to know if we would like to have her for a neighbor, and if we can secure her board at the same house with us."

"And can Mrs. Brown accommodate her?" her voice still very faint, but Bob only thought she was not interested in the question she asked.

"Oh, yes, I believe so."

Silence for some moments, then Mary said,

"You will enjoy her visit very much. She is such excellent company."

But in her mind she was doubting the good taste of Miss Rubioli in paying her lover an unsolicited visit in this manner.

"Miss Mary, I hope you will not misapprehend me, when I say that, though she is one of the most interesting ladies I ever met, I rather regret her coming."

He spoke tardily as with effort.

"Indeed! and may I ask why?"

She felt that courtesy demanded the question, but she hoped he would not answer it. He too, it seemed, doubted Miss Rubioli's taste.

"While Miss Leone is intelligent in a marked degree, she is very puzzling to me, a very enigma. She keeps my interest and solicitude strained painfully—tires my attention with her unceasing novelty, and I always experience a sense of relief when I escape her surveillance."

Mary gave him a look of quick surprise. What could he mean by discussing his lady-love, thus? Was it to conceal from her their tender relationship? Why should he try to deceive her? If he did not desire to make her the confidante of his cherished secret, there was no need he should fabricate an adverse opinion of character, to mislead her. Could Bob Dean stoop to such a craven act? These things sped quick as lightning through her mind, while her grand eyes spoke them from their startled depths. She said nothing.

"Why, Miss Mary, how shocked you look! What is the matter? Have I been too free in my speech, and do you so heartily espouse the cause of your sex? Let me assure you, I mean no disrespect. I thought you would know it!" and he laughed merrily. But when he saw her turn pale, and lines of pain or anger lie upon the sweet mouth—lines that were hard and new upon her face, he came nearer, and putting his hand on hers, said:

"Dear friend, do not be offended with me about so slight a thing. I assure you I mean no harm in speaking in this manner about the young lady. I speak only the truth, and thought you knew me well enough to understand the remarks aright; there was no disrespect."

"Don't mention it—it is of no further consequence," she said, taking her cold hand out of his, which, in his excitement, was too fervently improving its opportunity.

"Miss Mary, I do not understand you. Why do you look and talk so?—as if I had committed a crime, instead of an indiscretion? You are not used to take offence at a trifle, or to act inconsistently—please look at me and explain yourself. You make me miserable!"

She hesitated a moment, debating whether she should tell him what was in her mind—let him see how far he had failed of deceiving her by his subterfuge, and how disappointed she was in finding him capable of it; but she could not; she only looked gravely at him, and said:

"No, Mr. Dean; I am not inconsistent; nor have I taken offence at a trifle. To make a remark, be it true or false, for the purpose of creating a false impression—whatever the end sought—is no trivial thing. I can make no further explanation."

She stood up, as if to signify it would be better he should go. Bob was confounded, and began to grow angry.

"I am sure I am totally at a loss to know what you mean, Miss Mary, and must say I think you unkind to make allusion to false impressions, which you will not explain. You take me at a disadvantage, which, to say the least, is quite unpleasant."

"That may be true, Mr. Dean. But there is nothing to add to it."

"Then it only remains for me to bid you good-afternoon, trusting that time may throw some light on your strange conduct."

He took up his hat angrily and went to the door; then paused, as though it were impossible for him to leave her in anger; but she did not move nor look at him; so he went out, too respectful in his chivalry to allow himself the satisfaction of slamming the door.

She stood, as he had left her, listening to his receding foot-

steps, until the last echo died away; then dropping into the chair he had just vacated, which seemed still to feel his presence, she crossed her arms on the table, and laid her head down on them—"cried," you say? no; she did not cry; but thrilled and throbbed and trembled like a leaf on a wind-whipped lattice.

Her first feeling was consternation that she had passed hard words with her friend—her precious, peerless friend! it was a new sensation to be unfriendly with him, whose will and counsel it had grown second nature to receive and assimilate as her own. But her heaviest disappointment lay in the fact that he had tried to deceive her—in a slight manner at first, but persisted in, and augmented by an assumption of injured innocence—and it was Bob Dean had done this. In another, or towards another than herself, it would not have mattered so much, but they had never made a practice of even jesting or trifling in their conversation. Her disappointment was more poignant than when she had found Dr. Conway rotten at heart; for she had herself created him a nobleman, while Bob's integrity had grown and established itself on her, until she thought she *knew* he was true—now to have her confidence shattered at one fell blow—how could she ever trust anybody again? To say she was utterly miserable would but poorly express the state of her distracted heart.

Nor was Bob's mental condition in any degree less miserable. After leaving her he took a walk, only reaching home as tea was ready. Then he sat with Mrs. Brown and his mother, down-stairs, a little while, and mentioning unanswered letters—never failing excuse for people who wish to hide the true cause of isolation—he sought the solitude of his own room, regardless of the fact that he was to have cheered Mrs. Brown to-night. But he was not cheerful.

When his mother went up an hour afterward, she found him communing with the fire, while his eyes were shadowed and his brow roughened with thought lines.

"What is it, son?" and she caressed his waving hair on the hot temples.

"Nothing that I can tell you to-night, mother," he answered, taking her hand and putting it to his lips.

He had nothing to tell, except that Mary Lipscomb was angry with him without a cause, and very incomprehensible and inconsistent.

He did not wish to tell this, even to his mother—he loved her too fondly to tell her faults to another.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"CAN YOU DO SUCH A THING AS TO TRUST, WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING?"

BOB got through the next two days in some sort of a miserable way, coming home from his work heartless and dispirited.

His thoughts were all the time with Mary Lipscomb, and the more he pondered about her, the further was he from a solution of her strange conduct. And, moreover, the difference between, through the distortion of heartache and fretting, grew in magnitude, like lengthened shadows when the day goes down.

Friday evening came around—the time for her German lesson again, and he did not know how she would meet him, or whether he should go at all. He had debated the question with himself all day.

"Bob," said his mother, after tea, "I was around at Mrs. Lipscomb's this morning, and Mary asked me if you were coming to give her a lesson to-night. I thought strange she should ask it—did you say anything about not going?"

"Did she want me to come?" he asked, quietly.

"She did not say. She was preparing her exercise, but seemed troubled about something; looked tired and grieved, just as you do; though she made no complaint."

There was a half-sad, half-knowing smile on her face, as she looked up into his grave eyes. He put his arm around her caressingly, but said nothing.

"Come, Bob, there is no need for you two young folks to make yourselves miserable about some trifle, as you are doing. Tell me what the trouble is, and let me see if I cannot help you."

"Did she tell you anything?"

"Not a word which could have any bearing on your trouble. She treated me just as usual, only she seemed grieving, and I found her looking at me once, as if she were puzzled to know who and what I were."

"I cannot tell you much, mother, for I know nothing, except that she has wounded me deeply."

"And you have pained her equally as much. How could you be so cruel to one you love?"

"Don't mother—you hurt me! That I pained her is evident, but how I could not find out. She intimated that I had departed from the truth, in a statement I made, and she was not jesting. You must acknowledge that to be a bitter thing to hear from her lips, when her face was a striking witness that she spoke what she believed."

"And what was your statement?"

"We were speaking of Leone's coming, and she having

remarked that I would doubtless enjoy her visit very much, I, with more candor than prudence, or gallantry, answered that I did not enjoy the young lady's company—that she tired me. Whereupon Mary looked like I might have pronounced her to be a murderer, thief, or some other vile creature, and though I assured her I meant no disrespect, she would not forgive my impeaching the charms of her sex. When I besought her to explain, she said I had committed no trivial offence in endeavoring to produce a false impression. She would give no further light, and we parted coldly—or, rather, I was pretty hot."

"It was about Leone, then."

"I suppose so, though I am sure there was little enough said on that subject. The whole thing is incomprehensible."

"Mary Lipscomb has too much sense to get angry with you for speaking your feelings about anything—ungallant though she may regard it."

"And I did not speak with freedom or lightness even; in fact, I hesitated over my speech until one might say I stammered in timidity."

"Umph! Humph!"

This combination of letters represent a grunted affirmative, which stood for a very knowing "yes," and after uttering it, Mrs. Dean released herself from her son's encircling arms, and taking her rocking-chair, diligently smoothed her flaxen curls, as was her wont when thinking. Bob promenaded the narrow floor with long and soon-returning strides.

"Bob, has it occurred to you that Mary may have misapprehended your relations with Leone?"

"Relations with Leone?" He came to the rug and looked at her.

"Yes. She may think you are lovers, you know."

"Impossible! She has no ground for such a thought."

"From you, perhaps not—from her, I am not so sure."

"Mother, how can you say that? What do you mean?"

"Well, I will tell you, my son, as it now seems fit I should. When we were at Austin, we saw a great deal of Leone, in the brief time of our stay, and Mary was more with her than I. I hate to speak of it, son, out of respect to your feelings, as well as hers, but she evidently thinks a great deal of you. In short, she loves you, and cannot conceal the fact from a close observer."

"Mother!" He got up and made two circles of the room; then sitting down beside her, hid his face with his broad hand, saying:

"I know it—have known it a long time—before I left home. I did all I could to dispossess her of such a sentiment, by seeming to be ignorant of it. She positively persecuted me, but always in such a lady-like manner that I could not avoid it. It grieves me beyond words to know it, or to mention it even to you. But it is that which makes me look forward to her coming with so much discomfort."

"I hope we will be able to manage that pleasantly, dear. I am glad we understand each other; but I want Mary to understand, too. Leone may have conveyed the impression to her that there was some bond of tenderness between you, and your remarks about her, the other day, consequently sounded not only ungallant, but of a nature to convey a false impression."

Bob took his hand down from his face suddenly, and looked at Mrs. Dean; then puckering his lips slowly, finally brought out an emphatic whistle.

"Wh-i-i-i-ph! mother! why did n't I think of that? Of course, just because I did not have a woman's wits to think

with. That is the very reason of the whole matter. I am sure of it now."

Mrs. Dean nodded wisely, but said nothing.

"That is what she meant by its being no trivial offence to endeavor to create a false impression. She thought I had set myself out to try to deceive her. No wonder she was angry. But she might have known me better. I should never have doubted her."

"You are mistaken there, Bob. You have doubted her for the last two days; not her truth, for you had no cause to doubt that, but her justice."

"I thank you for the suggestion, little mother—for both suggestions. I was a simpleton not to have told you at once; but all men are, when they keep their troubles back from the women who love them. Is n't it time we were starting; we will already be late, and I am afraid she will be anxious to know whether we are coming."

His mother laughed at his eagerness, but put on her shawl, and they were soon at Mrs. Lipscomb's. They found only that lady herself in the sitting-room, and Bob was disappointed. He had hoped Mary would be waiting anxiously for him, as unhappy as himself about their misunderstanding. How could he know she had been flitting in and out, to and from the porch, for fifteen minutes, making a pretence to herself of being oppressed by the unreasonable warmth of the evening? that she had twice written her lesson to make sure there was no carelessness in the work? had placed and replaced the books and papers and lamp on the table, unable to satisfy herself as to the fitness of their position; and, prompted by some new and unexplained motive, had glided out of sight only when she heard his footstep?

Her mother had watched her curiously for the two days

past, but, shaking her head, asked no questions, knowing her child would come to her for comfort, as soon as the comfort could reach her. To-night she is beginning to grow impatient about whatever it is that makes Mary so unlike her usual calm self. She is quite sure it is something in which Bob Dean is concerned, and she has held her peace, hoping his coming to-night will do good to the restless spirit. So she is glad when he and his mother come.

A moment after Mary enters, quiet outwardly, though the quick breath and dilated eyes tell a tale of unrest, and the hand she gives Bob is cold and tremulous.

She goes immediately to work on her lesson, as if that were the sole object of the evening; and Bob follows her lead, acting, as nearly as he can, like the old ground of confidence had never been shaken. But, when the work is done, he puts the books aside with some emphasis, and rises.

"Now, Miss Mary, will you favor me with your company for a walk? The moon shines, and the night is mild—just delightful; come."

He takes up his hat as if he did not apprehend a denial, and he flushes when she softly answers,

"Not this evening, thank you, Mr. Dean."

Her words are timidly spoken, but her eyes are very determined.

Both mothers look up in surprise, and Mrs. Lipscomb exclaims:

"Why, Mary! of course you will go; you have not been out to-day! Go get your shawl, and take a good long walk. I am glad Mr. Dean is so thoughtful as to ask you; it will do you good, Baby-child."

Her eyes rest wistfully on her darling and carry their point, for Mary, standing so firm a moment past, now goes off for

her wraps, and, returning, passes out into the moonlight with Bob, without speaking again.

With her hand on his arm, against his true heart, it is no wonder if the old confidence return; for a moment she wonders that she could have doubted him; then reason comes up again, and the heartache with it.

The gate is closed behind them, and some paces made on the hard banquette before he speaks.

"Were you so unwilling to come you will not speak to me? Was it ungenerous in me to allow your mother to prevail on you to do, in filial duty, what you would not, of choice, grant me? Forgive me, I wanted so much to have you come."

"It does not matter. I was only—" indifferent, she was going to say, but her honesty forbids the words, and she leaves the sentence finished only with a caught breath.

"Miss Mary, what is amiss between us? I have offended you, I am sure, but am wholly innocent of such design."

After a brief silence, she answers gravely:

"Offended is not the word, Mr. Dean; yet I can find no other to express my wounded confidence."

"'Wounded confidence'—that means you have a trust in me, but it is no longer a whole and healthy trust. I am grateful that it is not wounded unto death. Perhaps if you will be candid with me, I may be able to say something which may heal the hurt, which is inexpressibly painful to me."

He speaks sadly, and the moonlight reveals in the face bent toward hers, that the words are very true. She is touched by the sight no less than the words, and tremblingly answers:

"And to me, too. But you ask an impossibility. I *cannot* explain to you."

"Then I shall have to make a plunge in the dark, and risk submerging myself into deeper mazes of misapprehension; for an explanation there must be—we two cannot go on, standing thus towards each other—I, at least, cannot bear it."

He pauses, but she does not speak, and the hand resting on his arm trembles so that he lays his right one upon it, and continues:

"I am almost afraid to approach the subject of Miss Rubioli, for I am sure that she is, unwittingly, the disturbing element between us. The fact has been suggested to my mind that you misapprehend the relation we bear to each other, and, basing your reason on that erroneous ground, conclude that in what I said the other day I deliberately set about deceiving you."

She does not answer, but turns her face away from him, arranging the white fleecy wrap she wears on her head; in so doing she drops her train, which she has been holding with her left hand, and removes her right from his arm to recover it. Having got rid of his clasp on her fingers she replaces it.

"Am I right, Miss Mary?"

"Yes."

"And you believe I could do such a thing?"

"I am loth to believe it. I can never make you know how terribly hard it is for me to *have* to believe it; but I have a good and sufficient reason."

There are tears in her voice and eyes. Bob hails their coming with hope; anything is better than this strange, icy Mary Lipscomb—any Mary Lipscomb, I mean.

"Will you tell me the reason?"

"I cannot; suffice to say it is sufficient and conclusive."

"Even against my spoken evidence? Truly your confidence has been shaken—mortally wounded, I fear. But does it occur

to you that you may be doing me a great injustice—a thing I do not merit at your hands?"

"Oh! Mr. Dean, don't say that. I would not, for the whole world, be unjust to you, who have been the best friend I ever had. You do not understand, and I cannot explain—*I cannot!*"

Her dark eyes are the pleading ones now. Bob is thinking. Evidently she has been told that he and Leone are lovers—told by some one who ought to know the truth, else she would not so firmly believe it. Who could be the informer, except Leone herself? Should he put his direct denial against her assertion? give the falsehood to her words, and she a lady, soon to be the guest of himself and mother? for, plainly she regarded this the position to which she was coming. It is impossible he should do so, unless it is his last resort.

As they pace on in silence her slender hand clings more tightly to his supporting arm, as if mutely pleading with him to forgive the pain she is causing him. It gives him comfort, too, and he longs to clasp it again, but remembers with what pains she removed it a while ago, and refrains.

If his next words had no meaning at all, their deep-touched tones ought to have been potent to move the woman's heart, beating so close to his own.

"Miss Mary, you say I have been a good friend to you. God knows, if an unswerving devotion of purpose counts for anything, I have meant to be. And now, I will put to the test your valuation of its genuineness. I have never deceived you—not in the veriest trifle—could I, in so momentous a thing? I ask you to believe me—trust me—and give you an immediate proof of my honesty. Lay up that sufficient, weighty reason you have in your mind, and do not allow it to stand against me. Sometime I can explain the seeming dis-

crepancy. Can you do such a thing as to trust without understanding? Will you trust *me*, my dear friend?"

He stops and looks full at her in the moonlight.

Those clear, gray eyes are true; the earnest voice is true; his past conduct has all been true; the great heart she can feel pulsing against her hand, must be—is true! The doubts are gone. Though she cannot understand—she believes him again. Oh! how glad to believe him. Taking her right hand from his arm, she puts the left with it, and both into his, saying:

"Yes, Mr. Dean, I believe you; I will trust."

Ah, Bob Dean, what a moment of triumph for you! Put on the brakes! your train of exultant joy may speed too swift for safety! The cloud is gone from his eyes, and they are so soft, so tender, I believe there are tears in them as he says:

"God bless you for that! Your faith is not misplaced; you will not regret it."

He puts her hand back upon his arm, but dares now to hold it too, and they walk on in silence. Mary wonders at the swift flood of happiness sweeping over her, but does not try to understand.

Bob does understand his bliss, but just now does not care to put that other question. He has enough joy to-night, in knowing her faith in him conquers that "sufficient reason to doubt him," even without removing the reason.

"I thank you," continues he. "You ask me no further question, and it is best. I will make it all plain by-and-by. Until then we will not talk about it. I shall have to go away soon, and I want all the rest of the moments to be pleasant ones."

When they reach the porch at home he stops her a moment on the steps where the moonlight is weaving shad-

owy fret-work from the vines overhead, and, speaking slowly, says:

"Mother and I are going over to Rockdale to-morrow to meet Miss Leone, and bring her back. We want you and Mrs. Lipscomb to go with us."

"Oh, no, Mr. Dean!" she says in a frightened way; then adds, softly, "Why?"

"It will be a pleasant ride, and we will enjoy your company. I want to see as much as possible of you both while I remain, and there is no reason, that *I* know, why you should not." He looks straight at her. "I want you; will you come?"

She thinks a moment, struggling with herself, but his wish conquers again.

"Yes, if mother is willing."

"Thank you."

And they go in doors.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TWO FORTUNES AS TOLD BY A GYPSY.

IT is just eleven o'clock next day when our three friends drive up to the station in Rockdale—only three, because Mrs. Lipscomb had found some good reason for not coming, but insisted that Mary should.

The team is gentle, so they draw near the station-house, and keep their seats in the wagon; this is a four-seated vehicle, with room in the rear for a trunk—to come on the train—besides an ominous-looking large basket, contents yet to be made known.

The train-whistle shrieks, and Bob hands Mary the reins, and goes to assist Miss Rubioli out. When, a moment later, they reach the wagon, Bob finds that Mary has slipped over to the back seat, with Mrs. Dean, leaving a vacant place next his for their guest.

Miss Rubioli looks very handsome in her stylish travelling suit, but her sallow face is thinner, and her great eyes deeper set, and more fiery, than when we saw her last.

She greets the other ladies with eager demonstrations of affection, and, seated by Bob, turns and looks about her almost happily.

The trunk is, of course, larger than Bob had expected, but is finally persuaded to adjust itself to the space allotted in the rear, and they drive gayly off, out of town. The day is lovely. Many of the trees are already decked in their light-green livery, while the swelling buds of the more prudent kinds diffuse a sweet, resinous odor to the spring air.

A few miles of sand, after leaving town, check the spirit of the horses, giving leisure for long breaths and talk.

"The country is so sweet—so fresh now!" said Miss Rubioli.

"But not pretty here, as in Travis County," suggested Mary.

"The country is always pretty, and grand, too, in its way," responded Bob.

"Still a lover of nature, Mr. Dean?"

"Of course. 'Nature never yet betrayed the heart that truly loves her.'"

"And other things do?" asked Miss Rubioli, her eyes reiterating the query with trebled points.

"I did not say so—the inference is your own. Come, Miss Leone, you must not try to make me cynical; you

have attempted that before, without success," said Bob, laughing.

"And liked you better, because I could not—you always refresh me, Mr. Dean," she said, in a low tone. Not so low, however, but Mary heard it, which fact Bob perceived from her quickly averted face—and he blushed. He now began to notice a thing, which annoyed him, while he could not remedy it, during the next two hours' ride—that Mary most conscientiously abstained from watching Miss Rubioli and himself. His answer to her last remark was loud enough for all to hear.

"And you think I am refreshing! For the same reason that nature is to-day—we are both green! The analogy is evident—Miss Leone, I cannot say I am complimented."

They all laugh, and Bob touches up the horses, the sand having been passed, and the road now being hard and fine.

Presently they reach and cross over Little River, which is spanned by a strong bridge. A little further on Bob turns out of the road to where three great Live Oaks blend in one their dusky shades, and here checks the team.

"Do you stop here? There is no town in sight," said Miss Rubioli, scanning the surroundings. "Is that house in the suburbs?" and she pointed to a primitive cabin on the hillside, a single room, built of logs, flanked by a nondescript addenda, with walls and roof of slabs, which might be fowl-house, pig-sty, or meat room; on the sloping top of this, five little "darkies" were basking their ugly bodies in the sun.

"Is n't that a picturesque group? We affect the rustic style here, you perceive."

"But where is the rest of the town? Where do *you* live?"

Bob laughed. "Not in that house. No, we are seven miles from C——."

"Then you have stopped to rest the horses? They look tired."

"And ourselves too," said Mrs. Dean. "Leone, don't you want to limn that group?"

They climbed out of the wagon and looked around them.

"The spring is just down there," said Mary, pointing to the foot of the hill, where was a little rill of bright water.

"And I am very thirsty," exclaimed Leone. "Let us go down to it."

They walked down, and Bob followed after, bringing with him the basket, which we find contained a most bountiful lunch, besides sundry cups, spoons, etc., and a little coffee-pot. Mary put two flat stones together and Bob made a fire of dry sticks between them, and boiled the coffee. The bounteous, gnarled roots of the live-oaks, cushioned with shawls, made convenient seats, comfortable as arm-chairs. Sandwiches, pickle, cold fowl, jelly-cake, and pies, never tasted better than this day, eaten in the sweet spring air, with all out-of-doors for a dining-room.

Bob is stretched full length on the ground, sipping his coffee and watching the ladies.

"Mother, Miss Leone, do you remember the day we dined like this on Mount Bonnell?"

The younger lady's eyes flash assent, and a bright spot leaps to her cheek and stays, but she is silent.

"Indeed I do," answers Mrs. Dean. "That was the day the gypsy woman came and told you young people's fortunes."

"Yes," Bob said, thoughtfully. Mary noticed a peculiar expression about his mouth; and his eyes looked a moment

at hers, then searched Leone's half-averted face, as if craving a mute permission.

Whatever he wanted he did not get, for when she did look at him, her face burned a purple red, and her weird eyes flashed a gleam of—was it supplication or defiance? then dropped, as in shame.

Mary was painfully puzzled over the silent play, and wished she knew how to get away and give them opportunity to explain to each other in words what was in their minds and faces. There was the basket to repack—she would go about that; she put her hand on the tree-root to rise, when Bob put his out and detained her, saying:

"Wait, Miss Mary, and I will tell you about that day, and our fortunes as oracled by the gypsy sibyl."

He looked once more at Leone, but got no look back. His eyes were very determined now, though they bore an expression of grieving, spite of a smile, as he said:

"There was a gay party of us up on Mount Bonnell. We had admired the inexpressible beauty of scenery, the fair valley with its blue river smiling beneath us, the grand mountains in the purple distance, and the silver streams threading through the cedar-clad hills to the west, all of which, seen from the height we were on, seemed like a picture on canvas. We had looked over the 'Mad Lover's Leap,' and cut our names, one above another's, on the mutilated cedar crowning it. Then we went down the mountain-side again to our carriages, and were eating lunch, just as we are doing now, when the woman came—a pretty woman of her age, for a gypsy—and begged to tell our fortunes. We were just the crew for any new madness, and several of us had in turn listened to the revelation of the future, when it came our time—I mean Miss Leone's and mine. May I tell yours, Leone? for I mean Miss Mary shall hear mine."

"No, I will tell it myself, Mr. Dean. Miss Mary, she said I should be often loved, and refuse to be moved, till I should grow to fear I was incapable of love—then unawares, should find I worshipped an ideal, which was nobler even than I deemed; 't would be a question resting in divine art to decide, whether I should gain my desire and be happy, or fail and be miserable—if I gained, I should be less happy than I expected; if I failed, my misery would be ameliorated by the very cause of failure. That was all, and of course the whole tale was unsatisfactory, and I wished I had kept in my pocket the silver with which I had crossed her palm."

"I should have wanted a priest to explain the message of the oracle," said Mary. "It seems to me your future was only veiled in deeper obscurity."

"It will never be explained; but I understand it as well as I want to, and it will be as true as gospel."

"Is n't it rather void of comfort, though?" asked Mary, laughing. "I should n't know whether I would rather succeed and miss great happiness, or fail and find comfort."

"I will take the success, and risk happiness. I *will* have it!" she added, with set teeth.

Bob and Mrs. Dean exchanged glances.

"She did not even tell you," said Mrs. Dean, "whether your dear ideal was to be a creature of flesh and blood, or only a part of that art on which its fate depended."

"No, and I am glad she did not; it has always been a comfort to me to know that it admits of either construction."

She drew a deep breath and leaned back against the tree behind her. When she first began to speak she was nervous, and her attenuated fingers tremblingly plucked at a spray of green she held; but now her statuesque manner returned, and

her face was as colorless as old ivory. Turning to Bob she said:

"Had we better not ride on, Mr. Dean? I should like to rest soon."

"Yes, in a moment. Miss Mary has not heard my fortune yet."

He changed his position so he could not see Leone, and addressed his words to Mary, who saw there was a deliberate purpose in them.

"My fate is not to be obscure like my friend's there. As soon as the sibyl scanned my palms, and put a hair from my temple into her left ear, she prophesied without doubt or delay. I was to love only once, but oh, so fondly! love the dearest, sweetest, best woman in the world; through much perplexity and a risked life (mine or another's, not known), should win her. I should call her fond names without end, but the sweetest of all should be 'Beatrice,' and I should never weary of its syllables."

Bob's face was mobile with its stirred feelings as he talked; he was realizing the sweetness of the words in his deepest heart, and was unprepared for the startled look of Mary's eyes, resting full on his, as he pronounced the name. He knew she had connected it, in her mind, with Leone, but he did not know she had seen his written avowal of devotion to his "Beatrice," which was the ground of all their recent trouble. She looked at Miss Rubioli, and saw that dark flush rise again to her brow, then fade. This lady Bob abstained from seeing, but he watched Mary steadily and read her mind; he pursued the subject:

"This, you will apprehend, was very comforting to me. In the first place, I should not be in doubt (if I believed my prophetess) as to the genuineness of my passion, as there was

to be but one. Secondly, I should certainly win her, the vanquished difficulties—risked life, etc.—only adding laurels to my victory. My charming 'Beatrice' found, there will be nothing left to be done, but for her to proceed at once to make me 'happy.'"

Bob was astonished at his own audacity, and paused, feeling that the treasures of Vanderbilt were less than the fortune he would give—if he had it—to be able to know, certainly, that his presaged fate would be verified in the gift of the pure young heart that was looking through those candid, wondering eyes into his.

How he could talk so, with Miss Rubioli present, was what astonished Mary. If there was no love between them she could not understand all this conversation, which, it seemed to her, had been brought about on purpose to let her into a knowledge of why Miss Rubioli was called "Beatrice." Yet Bob's demeanor was not lover-like, but friendly, with the free lightness of a brotherly privilege. She could make nothing of it; but she had promised Bob to trust him. And she did it, taking comfort in the thought that she could. Her confidence was strengthened, somehow, by this hour's talk, for he was evidently carrying out some purpose in relating his story, and she believed it was connected with, and leading to, the full explanation which was, in time, to reward her faith in him. It was hard for her to realize now that Leone Rubioli was nearer to him than herself, so sweet and precious did the newly-restored confidence seem.

Bob now rose from the ground, and, assisting the ladies to their feet, they put up the remnant of the luncheon, and were presently under way again.

It was four o'clock when they came to Mrs. Brown's gate, which was first reached on the way. Mary proposed that she

should get out here with the other ladies, not detaining the team any longer. Bob settled the question by asking her to hold the reins for him, while he took his mother, Miss Rubioli, and their numerous packages into the house. A colored man came out for the trunk, and then Bob and Mary drove off together. When they reached her home, and he had assisted her out, and opened the gate for her, he stopped an instant, saying:

"Miss Mary, I thank you for your faith in me to-day. I can see that you have not, as the boys say, 'gone back' on the promise you made me last night. It will do me good all the days of my life."

Almost any other woman would have read the full tale of love in those beaming gray eyes. But Mary was thinking of Miss Rubioli, and believed they beamed for her. She felt very lonely when he was gone, and, standing under the honeysuckles, watched the little cloud of dust the wagon left behind.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BEATRICE NOT LEONE.

SEVERAL days after Miss Rubioli's arrival, Bob was met, on his return home in the afternoon, by Mrs. Brown, at the front door, with an open letter in her hand; she was in a quiver of joy and excitement.

"Oh, Mr. Dean, I 've a letter from Jennie, which is written from New Orleans; and she is homesick, and does n't want to go to Virginia now; so they started back on the day this was written, and will be here to-night—no bad luck happen-

ing. I am too glad for anything, and I want to get you to go round to Mrs. Lipscomb's and ask her and Mary to come and spend the evening and meet them. I am looking for them every minute. I could send Mat, but I'd rather you would go."

"And I'd rather go, too, dear Mrs. Brown. I would not lose the pleasure of being the messenger of so much happiness for anything. I will change my coat and go at once. I want to see Jennie myself," and he ran merrily up to his room.

He found it vacant, but could hear Leone singing, softly, in his mother's room, next. He rapped at the door.

"Come in, Mr. Dean, come in!"

Leone looked round with bright eyes. She had taken out her easel and brushes, and was always happy at this work.

"Where is mother?" Bob asked, stopping in the door.

"She went out somewhere, just after dinner—perhaps to Mrs. Lipscomb's—leaving me to keep room for her. Can I do anything for you in her stead?"

"Thanks, I want nothing. I am going out a little while, and wanted she should know."

He closed the door, and the brightness all left the artist's face, as if a sheet of sunlight had been shut out. Her pencil was laid down, and her deep-set eyes wandered off to some unhappy part of dreamland.

Bob had scrupulously avoided private interviews with her since her coming, and she could no longer disguise from her tortured heart that her love was hopeless. But she had no element in her nature to brook defeat, and was not ready to quit the field, vanquished—there were other measures yet untried.

"*Good* evening, Mr. Dean!"

"Mrs. Delgado, how are you?" responded Bob, as that lady arrested his progress, a little way down the street.

"Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Dean. Really, I believe I am nearly as glad of your good fortune as you can possibly be yourself."

"My good fortune? To what do you refer?"

"Oh! it is all true then. You have more than *one* good fortune! I congratulate you a *second* time!"

She put the tips of her gloved fingers together, and, rolling up her eyes, shook her head from side to side in ecstasy, too deep for more words.

"You mystify me, madam. Will you be kind enough to explain?" asked Bob.

"Really, I thought you would understand. I hope I am not *bold* in mentioning it, but I *heard* that you had inherited quite a fine fortune, and had, moreover, gained the consent of a fair lady, of equal station, to share it with you, who, rumor says, is so true and devoted, that she cannot brook a long absence from your beloved companionship. The news rendered me *quite* happy, I assure you. I do take *such* a warm interest in the welfare of my friends, among whom I esteem you *chief*. I shall take an early opportunity to call, and make the acquaintance of your charming affiancee. Oh!" she cried, piteously, as she saw he was about to deny the rumor, "please do not tell me it is not true."

"I thank you, madam, for your kind wishes, but I am sorry to inform you that your information is not all correct. Good day!" and, laughing, he touched his hat and passed on.

Mrs. Delgado would willingly have sacrificed the longest of her iron-gray curls to have found out which part of the report was true—the fortune, or the lady-love; but before she could rally for a new volley of questions, Bob had gone beyond recall.

Although he had laughed at Mrs. Delgado's version of matters, Bob was yet considerably annoyed. He would have much preferred keeping secret his recent good luck in fortune for his own pleasure, but that was of minor consideration in comparison with the other report, which might be compromising to his own honor and to the modesty and discretion of Leone Rubioli. It certainly placed him in an awkward position, and he most heartily wished his fair guest back in Austin, in Rome, or even in "Halifax," if that place were agreeable to her. He found Mary giving a music lesson.

"Have a seat, Mr. Dean," she said, with a smile of welcome.

"Do not let me interrupt you. I have a message for you, but it and I can wait, and in the meantime I will look at your new monthly—mine is yet unopened."

"I shall be done and at leisure in just ten minutes," responded Mary, continuing her lesson.

Bob seated himself at the round table where they were accustomed to do their German work, but did not take up the journal he had mentioned. His face was partly averted from Mary, but, glancing round her pupil's back at him, presently, she noticed that a crimson stain had mounted to the edge of his clustering hair, and the ear next her and his neck were the same ardent hue. Wondering, she looked to see what he was examining so intently. He had found the book that he had recently loaned to her, which still contained that *terrible* little billet-doux. She had left it in the book, and this afternoon brought the latter into the sitting-room, intending when done her lessons to take it home, hoping she might be able to slip it into the bookcase without attracting attention to it. He had opened it, found the paper, and read it. Oh, why did she let him catch her eye? He must know that she, too,

had read it. What would he do? Now he could understand her suspicion—her almost positive assurance that he loved Leone. How would he be able to explain it, and his seeming denial? She was glad the crisis had come, but dreaded it—dreaded for the lesson to be finished, when she would be left alone with him. She meant to ignore his conscious look, and let him pass it by, unmentioned, if he wished.

"One, two, three, and four—no, Ella; that is not right—one, two, three, *and* four—last two quick—that will do—one, two, three, four."

She wishes she dare look at him again—and immediately does so—timidly—she sees that though the blush has scarcely paled, there is a quiet, half sad smile on his face, and a very determined set of the square chin, that portends something.

"Play this once more, Ella—one, two—"

"But Miss Mary, my time is out—the clock has struck five; and please let me go, for mamma wants me."

"Very well—yes, you have had your full time. Good-bye—don't forget to practice."

She opened the door for her pupil, then said to Bob,

"Your mother is here, Mr. Dean, helping *my* mother to plant garden this afternoon. I will go bring them in, if you will excuse me a moment."

She was already at the door, but Bob, with an importunate gesture, detained her.

"Not yet, Miss Mary; I have something to say to you first. Won't you please sit down and talk with me?"

He drew the arm-chair forward, and seated her, but went himself off to the mantel, where he could look at her.

He was quite composed now, but his voice took a key which thrilled her being. Taking the slip of paper from his breast pocket, he said:

"You saw this, Miss Mary?"

"I did. But the reading of it was unintentional—I thought it some remarks about the book, until it was read."

"It is unnecessary to tell me that, my friend. I am glad I found it. This was the cause of your doubting my veracity the other day, was n't it?"

"Yes. Pretty conclusive, was it not?" she asked, smiling.

"Your 'good and sufficient reason,'" he said, thoughtfully. "And did no one tell you anything to add to this?"

"No."

"I am very thankful for that." His face lit up wonderfully now. "Had I known it, I should not have put your faith in me to so severe a test. However, I do not regret that," he added, with triumph in his eyes, "since it has borne it and is purified 'as by fire.' But since no one told you who my 'Beatrice' is, why do you so positively confer the appellation on Leone? Why not some other?"

His eyes search hers to a purpose.

"Why not some other? How could it be any other?" she asked, wondering. "Have not you always called her so, yourself? I never heard you use the name in connection with any other."

He studied his own feet on the floor, and fixed his mouth as if to whistle; but he did not mean to whistle. He was thinking. Drawing a sudden, deep breath, he said:

"No, Miss Mary, I did not give the title to her, neither have I ever called her by it in my life, nor ever shall. She assumed it. You will not misapprehend me, if I say so, I hope—I find you are not so violent a champion of your sex, as I had thought—"

"Champion of my sex? I do not understand."

"Of course not—I have not yet explained that; no matter, let it pass for the present. I said she assumed the name. After the incident on Mount Bonnell, of which I told you"—he now came over to the table and sat down beside her—"we were having some amateur theatricals, for a charity benefit; several persons represented portraits of illustrious character and distinguished paintings, by standing motionless behind picture frames. She chose Beatrice Cenci, and really bore some resemblance to the copies we see of Guido's great masterpiece.

"Some friend, who had heard the gypsy's prophecy, rallied me about her, in her presence, and, prompted by gallantry, I avowed myself delighted with the personation, and only regretted I could not retain so fair a picture, until my veritable 'Beatrice' should put in her appearance. Whereupon she set to work and sketched her own face, '*en costume de Beatrice*,' and presented me with it. Of course I was properly grateful, and she has seemed ever since to consider herself as having a title to the name and character; and that is all. I hope you will pardon my freedom in telling this to you, which I do with all merited respect towards the young lady. I feel that I have a right to do so now, on learning from you that your impression was received from no information—" he stopped and turned red again—"from any one."

Mary was thinking profoundly. She had done Bob a great injustice, while he had been blameless. How glad was she that she had been able to trust him at last, and wait for the explanation. How glad that he did not love Leone Rubioli, who was all unworthy of him—yet, poor Miss Rubioli—for she certainly loved him—how sad to love hopelessly. Yet it might be he did love her—he had not said he did not, only denied having called her his "Beatrice."

This last thought raised her eyes to his again. His temple

was resting on the tips of his strong fingers—for he was leaning with his arm on the table, and he was intently looking at her.

"You understand me, I believe," he said, in a low, full voice, "and now it only remains for me to add, that it is yourself, and not Miss Rubioli, who is addressed in these fond words, foolishly penned in a moment of uncontrolled ardor, lost and anxiously sought for in secret, while they were all the time in your possession, only to bring doubt and misery between us."

He took down his hand and sat erect.

One startled look, and the beautiful face was shielded by a white, protecting hand, raised like his had been to her brow, while she now leaned on the table. He could see but little of a very rosy face, a trembling mouth, and a heaving bosom. His soul was in his eyes, but she did not see it.

"Beloved, will you give yourself to me? 'T is needless I should repeat the tale of my love."

She took her hand down and slowly raised her starry eyes to his—only an instant, till they fell again; her lips moved as if she would speak, but no words came.

"I am not a patient man, Mary."

She put out her hand, saying:

"Yes, I love you, and I am not afraid."

There was no longer any distance between them, for he had her in his hungry bosom, kissing her sweet, blushing face, as he murmured,

"My Beatrice has made me 'very happy.'"

"Don't, please, Mr. Dean—never, never call me that."

"You are right, I will not. I will find other sweet words to tell my fondness, until I can call you 'wife.' Come, 'Baby-child,' let's go find our mothers."

"Oh! Mr. Dean!"

"Oh, Miss Lipscomb, why not? I am not ashamed of you, are you of me?"

Their two mothers were planting peas out in the garden. They were on opposite sides of a neatly raked bed, stretching a line. Mrs. Lipscomb's back was towards them, but Mrs. Dean, rising just as they approached, read Bob's joy in his candid face. She waited, silent.

"Mother," said Bob, coming behind Mrs. Lipscomb, who was lustily driving her stake into the ground.

She turned and looked curiously at them a moment, then laid a hand on a shoulder of each, and kissed them in turn.

Mrs. Dean walked straight across the pretty bed, leaving clear tracks of her little feet in the yielding loam.

The four now go back into the house together, and shut the door after them. They have shut us out; but we know that peace, and love, and joy are with them.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"GOD DECREES OUR LOVES AS WELL AS OUR LIVES."

"AND you are as happy as a princess, Jennie?"

Tea was over, and Mary was promenading the wide, long walk, from porch to front gate, with the little returned bride, on the evening of her arrival. It was warm in the lighted parlor, and so the two girls came out into the moonlight to pour out their hearts to each other.

"Yes, indeed; I never was so happy in my life. Duval is always kind and good. He took me everywhere to see every-

thing; but I did n't care much for them. My pretty things were ever so much admired, and people seemed to know instinctively that we were just married, and of course looked at us a great deal. I quite captivated a young lawyer in Galveston; but I promised Doctor I would quit flirting if he would; so I gave my admirer the sinister shoulder, on conscience."

She drew a deep sigh, as if the sacrifice still weighed on her mind.

"Ah, Jennie! the same child. Will you never learn to take a serious view of life?" said Mary, laughing.

"Oh, yes, indeed; I do think seriously, Mary. That is one reason I wanted to come home now. I am so giddy and light, I do not want Duval's people to know me until I grow older and wiser; I am afraid they would ridicule me to him. By-and-by we will go to Virginia, when we 've grown more used to each other."

"What an idea, child!"

"I know I am all silly, Mary; but you must talk to me a great deal, and teach me to be like you; for, do you know, darling, that at one time he came near loving you the best? and I want to learn to be all things that he admires. I 'll not let him know it though, be sure, for it would spoil him. Men must be managed, you know."

She gave a wise shake to the bewitching little head, and hugged Mary in the fulness of her joy; but she rattled on:

"Do you know, I wonder you don't hate me for taking him away from you?"

"No, little one; I could love you for that. We were wholly unsuited, and would have been mutually miserable. Shall I tell you a secret, Jennie?"

She felt herself blush, though they were now in the dusk of

a live-oak, where they found a convenient rustic seat, and made themselves comfortable to finish their talk.

"Oh, you witch! I know it without being told. I can see it in your face—yours and Mr. Bob's and your mother's. I am glad—so glad, Mary, for he has loved you truly, ever since he came—before—before Doctor was shot; and for a while he was so sad and hopeless. I am, oh! *so* glad—it has all come right. There he comes now, looking for you—and Miss Rubioli is with him—poor thing! I know I'd go home, if I were her! What a goose she is to think of loving him. Here we are, Mr. Dean!"

"Little madam, your husband has been asking for you, and I volunteered to find you."

"I don't care. He need n't think I shall always stick right by his side!" she said, with a show of petulance; but it was patent that she was glad he had missed her, and was willing to go to him.

"Shall I take you to his side just this one time? Your father says he wants you again, too, and I would like to have you a little while myself," said Bob, offering her his free arm. "Miss Mary, I shall have to ask you to take Jennie's hand now, if you too will be led in."

"No, Miss Mary," said Leone, releasing his arm; "let them go in without us, and we will sit here and talk a little while," and she took the seat Jennie vacated.

"Certainly," said Mary.

"What a sweet, pretty little woman is Mrs. Conway."

Leone's eyes followed the two who were walking slowly up the moonlit path, in earnest conversation.

"What do you think of her husband?"

"He is an intelligent and accomplished gentleman, but vain and selfish, and already afraid of his wife, who is a great

deal shrewder than she appears, and much stronger in character than he."

"Yes; you are right about that. Jennie has a true, good woman's heart, and her flippancy is a habit she will outgrow in time."

"It is good for her that she intends to rule her own life; he would make a magnificent failure if he should attempt to steer their matrimonial barque by *his* will-power—it would strand for want of momentum."

"How skilled you are in character-reading. I believe I know them scarcely better now than you do. Yet he does possess strength in some ways."

Mary was thinking of certain incidents of the past winter, and remembered he had been sometimes almost too strong for her peace of mind.

"He admires himself strongly."

"And he is persistent in anything he much desires."

"Oh, he is not without his good points! A splendid-looking man. I think I never saw a handsomer, as far as mere flesh and blood go for beauty. If he had a sterner eye and a stronger mouth, I should like to have him sit for my Agamemnon.

'Oh, he was cast in the mould of Titans: a magnificent man,
With head and shoulders like a god's!'"

"You have your new picture under way?"

"Hardly; the outline is sketched. I shall put you in for Iphiginea—I think you would make a sublime martyr to patriotism or filial love."

"Oh, please no! I would much prefer to be excused from such glory, and be allowed to enjoy happiness in an ordinary way."

"Of course. Anybody would; but that is not saying you are incapable of the highest sacrifice a mortal could make, if duty should demand it."

"I do not know. I should be *very* certain—convinced beyond the possibility of a doubt, that it was duty's voice bidding me, and not that of some syren, born of an inflamed imagination or morbid romance—before I'd move to the stake. Of course, we are speaking figuratively, Miss Leone, but in truth, I believe many of the grand sacrifices of which we read might be dispensed with, and the end better attained by a more practical and a kinder method."

A silence of some moments followed, and then Leone spoke in a hushed, tremulous voice:

"I wish you had not said that. Because I want to ask a grand sacrifice of you. I want—I will try to tell you—oh, Mary Lipscomb, Mr. Dean loves you—I can see it plainly enough now—and you love him—but, oh! not like *I* love him. I have lived only in the hope that he would seek me for his own—lived so long on that, that I cannot live without it. You know I have heart-disease, Mary. My physician tells me it is not organic, but only nervous, and that if my mind is at rest, and I am happy, I may live long, and perhaps be well once more, but that grief or worry may be fatal to me. I feel—I know if I lose him—my only love—loved with the fire and passion of my Italian artist blood—I shall die! Oh, life is sweet! so fair to me, with him. Death is hard for one young as I, with wealth and talent and reputation. You have not known him long—you can soon forget him. I have loved him from my childhood—loved him so fiercely, that it has always been a battle with propriety, not to go and lie at his feet and plead that he take me up."

She dropped on the ground at Mary's feet, and clung to

her hands like a drowning creature, while her silken garments trailed in the dust.

"Oh! Miss Rubioli, hush, hush! You must not talk so!" said Mary, with a deadly fear coming over her. Could it be that this woman's "fate" was to come and overshadow her life? Would she "succeed and miss happiness" because she claimed a heart that belonged to another?

"Can you not find it in your heart—your noble woman's heart—to pity me? Oh, give him up, and he will come to *me* for comfort; he must—he must—make the sacrifice, and you will have your reward; for if I lose him I will die, and sink into perdition!"

"Miss Rubioli, you do not know what you ask." She paused to pray for strength. "You do not know how perfectly our hearts are united—he would never consent."

"But you will be firm and strong in your denial of him—and my love will compel his in time. It is deep and resistless, and his soul could not help yielding to the tide. Oh! Mary, you believe in Jesus Christ and his Divine sacrifice—He gave himself as a model to His redeemed, they say. I do not ask your life to save mine, but only that you give me back my love—my love."

"Miss Rubioli, I might be able to give you my life to save yours if He were to show me it was my duty—I might be; but your passion is an unholy one—our Father has joined our hearts in one, and no one shall put them asunder."

She spoke calmly now, and was strong.

"Oh, do you—can you, deny me? think! I have nothing else—no mother—my father never loved anything, for he has only a stone in his cruel bosom; I have lived only for my art and my love—if I lose him, my genius will forsake me, for he is always my inspiration. Oh, dear woman, have pity on me."

"Get up and sit beside me." She raised the prostrate figure, and put her arms around her for support. "You are talking wildly. God decrees our loves as well as our lives, and we may no more put aside the one than the other without guilt."

Leone lay motionless on her shoulder, scarcely breathing. Surely this was a sad paragraph in the first sweet chapter of her love life. Could it be her duty to listen to the prayer of this bereft heart? Would God will that she should pluck the sweet, new blossom of joy from out her soul, that it might possibly take root and bloom again about this ruined temple —sadly ruined, when its presiding spirit could abjectly crave another woman's lover. Oh, that God would plainly show her what to do, and how to give comfort to this poor, once proud creature.

"Miss Mary, are not you and Miss Leone sitting still too long in the night air?"

It was Bob's voice, and his hand touched her shoulder and cheek. Her impulse was to spring to him, so timely was the help his presence brought.

She put her hand into his, saying,

"Yes, it is chill now, and we will go in."

She gently raised Leone with her other hand, but was frightened at the passive weight of her frail form.

"Do you feel tired, Miss Leone? Shall we not go in now?"

"Yes, we will go in now."

Her voice had a far-off sound—unnatural and weird.

"Take my arm, Leone," said Bob.

She obeyed, and they went into the broad belt of moonlight, and Mary looked at her in suspense. But she was only a little whiter and colder than usual—even her eyes were still and passive. She raised her head high, and said:

"I see Dr. and Mrs. Conway at the gate, and will join them a little while before going in."

Withdrawing her hand from Bob's arm she walked away with firm and queenly tread.

Bob looked thoughtfully at her a moment, then took Mary to the house in silence; but when he reached the shadow of the porch, he took her to his heart, saying:

"I heard her last appeal, and your answer, my darling. Oh! how I thank God that you had strength to see that your duty to our united hearts is the highest that can ever be laid on either of us. Let no other thought ever come between us, Mary."

THE END.

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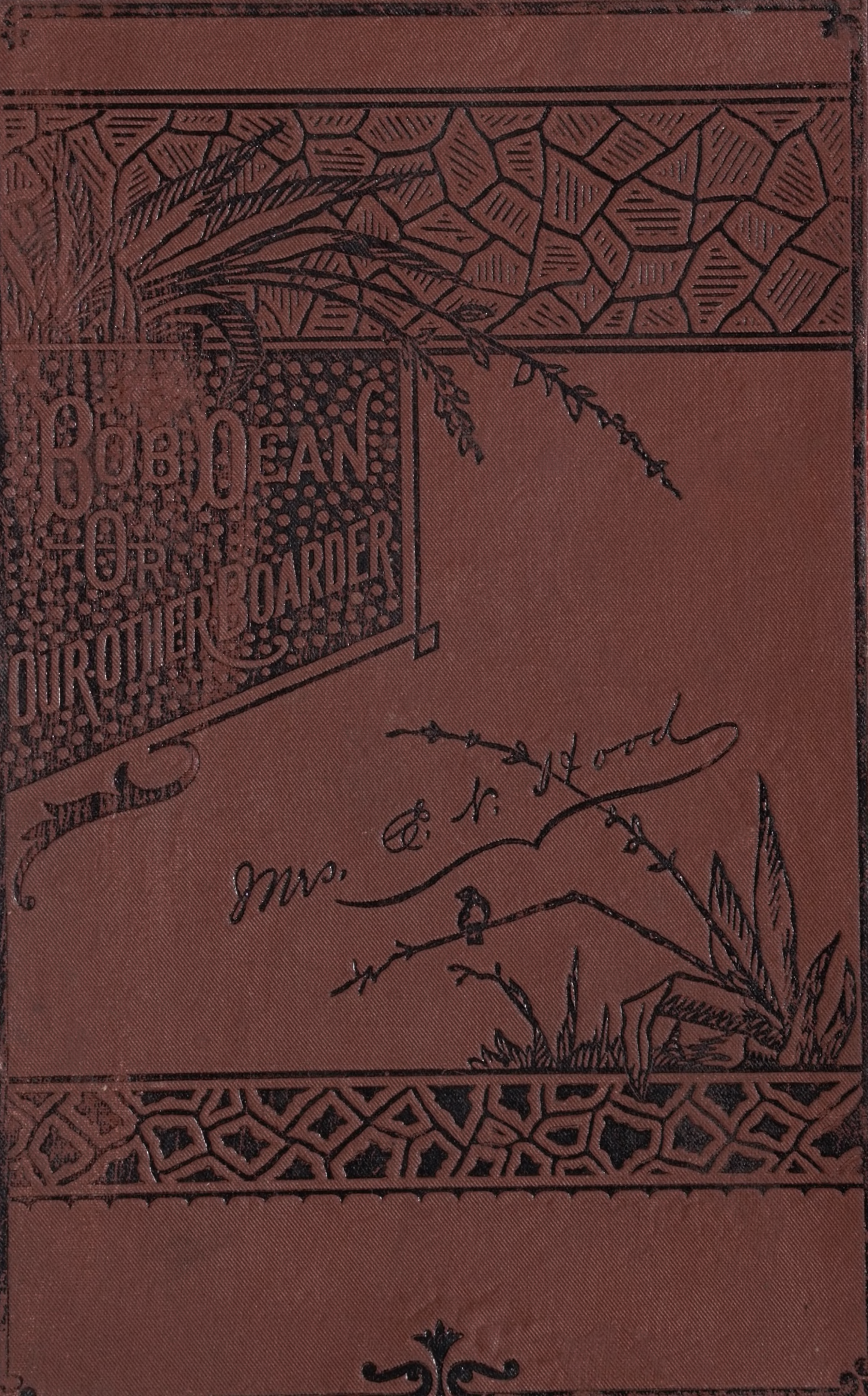
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